

Pumpkins, winter squash will keep a long time

Pumpkins and hard-shelled winter squash will keep well into the new year if properly stored now.

These late-ripening vegetables should be stored in a dry, ventilated area with a temperature between 50 and 55 degrees.

The variety and type of

squash or pumpkin determines the length of its storage life. The storage life of hard-shelled winter squash are: Table Queen will benefit some pumpkins and squash. Curing involves holding squash and pumpkins at a temperature favorable for healing cuts

and scratches and for forming a protective corky layer over injuries and cut surfaces on the stem.

Under good storage conditions, well-matured squash don't need to be artificially cured.

Nearly mature squash (except acorn types) and pump-

(acorn type), one to two months; Butternut, two to three months; Hubbard types, Banana, Buttercup (turban type), three to six months; Sweet Meat squash, four to six months.

Jack O'Lantern and Connecticut Field variety pumpkins can be stored for two to

three months.

Leave pumpkin and squash on the vine until mature, but regardless of size, they should be harvested before the first heavy frosts.

When their rinds are hard enough to resist fingernail scratches, squash are ready for harvest. Handle the

vegetables carefully to keep them in good condition. Those with bruises should not be kept for storage because bruises will not heal. However, cuts and scratches in the skin will heal over.

A short period of curing before harvest will also deteriorate rapidly.

A relative humidity of 75 percent, about normal for garages or other suitable storage areas in western Oregon, is satisfactory.

A temperature range between 50 and 55 degrees is important. In addition, be sure to keep the surface of the vegetables dry to prevent the growth of decay fungi and bacteria.

80-85 degrees and a relative humidity of 80-85 percent. A warm room in the house is usually adequate for the job.

If stored in temperatures below 50 degrees, squash and pumpkins deteriorate rapidly. Those that have been exposed to freezing before harvest will also deteriorate rapidly.

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Good air circulation will help prevent moisture from forming on the surface of the vegetables.

Don't leave pumpkins and squash on cold concrete floors. Where necessary, provide storage shelves for them. Do not store them near apples, pears or other ripening fruit because ripening fruit releases ethylene gas which causes the squash to yellow and shortens storage life.

Are less resistant to disease

Houseplants need special care during winter

Now that the cold, wet fall weather has set in, it's time to get houseplants ready for the long haul indoors until next spring.

"Houseplants usually aren't too vigorous during the winter because growing conditions are often poor," said Ray McNeilan, Oregon State University extension home gardening agent.

"The light level is usually inadequate, the humidity too low and the temperature too high."

Houseplants respond best to temperatures from 60 to 74 degrees F. They also need a definite change in temperatures at night, just as occurs in nature. A drop of five to 10 degrees at night will give the plants a chance to build new tissues from the food supply they manufacture during the day.

Plants tend to become spindly, produce poor quality flowers and are less resistant to disease and insect attack when put in a room that is too hot, according to McNeilan.

With the days getting shorter, a check of light levels in indoor plants is advisable. For most plants, especially flowering ones,

the ideal position is near a large window with a southern exposure.

Generally, foliage plants need less light than flowering ones and most of them will grow well in any window exposure.

Window light can be supplemented with electric light. Fluorescent lighting provides the most light for the energy used and doesn't add much heat to the room.

Plants also need less water during the winter. It's best to let the soil dry slightly before watering again with most plants. The soil should be moist after watering, not saturated. Be sure to let any excess water drain out the bottom of the pot.

Do not leave drained water standing in the dish or other receptacle the plant may sit in.

Fertilizer needs of indoor plants are reduced during the winter months. McNeilan suggests letting houseplants go without fertilizer for the entire period of time between Thanksgiving and Easter.

Geraniums, coleus and fuchsias are examples of plants that have a tendency during the fall and winter to

become spindly, weak and unsightly. Such plants respond favorably to frequent pinching or cutting back, which helps stimulate new roots.

Remove seed pods and wilted flowers and leavers and prune back long, straggly stems to within one-eighth inch of a leaf joint.

Some plants may need to be put in larger pots to maintain their maximum growth. Most vigorously growing indoor plants require repotting every year or two.

On the other hand, some plants actually grow better when they are potbound. The common wax plant, which doesn't bloom unless pot-

bound, is a good example.

A good way to find out whether a plant is potbound is to examine the root system. Spread one hand over the top of the soil, turn the pot upside down, tap the rim softly against the edge of a table to loosen the soil, and remove the old pot. A solid mass of roots with little or no soil visible indicates the plant is potbound.

When repotting, use a new container about two inches

deeper and wider than the old one. This is usually one

size larger if you are using clay flower pots.

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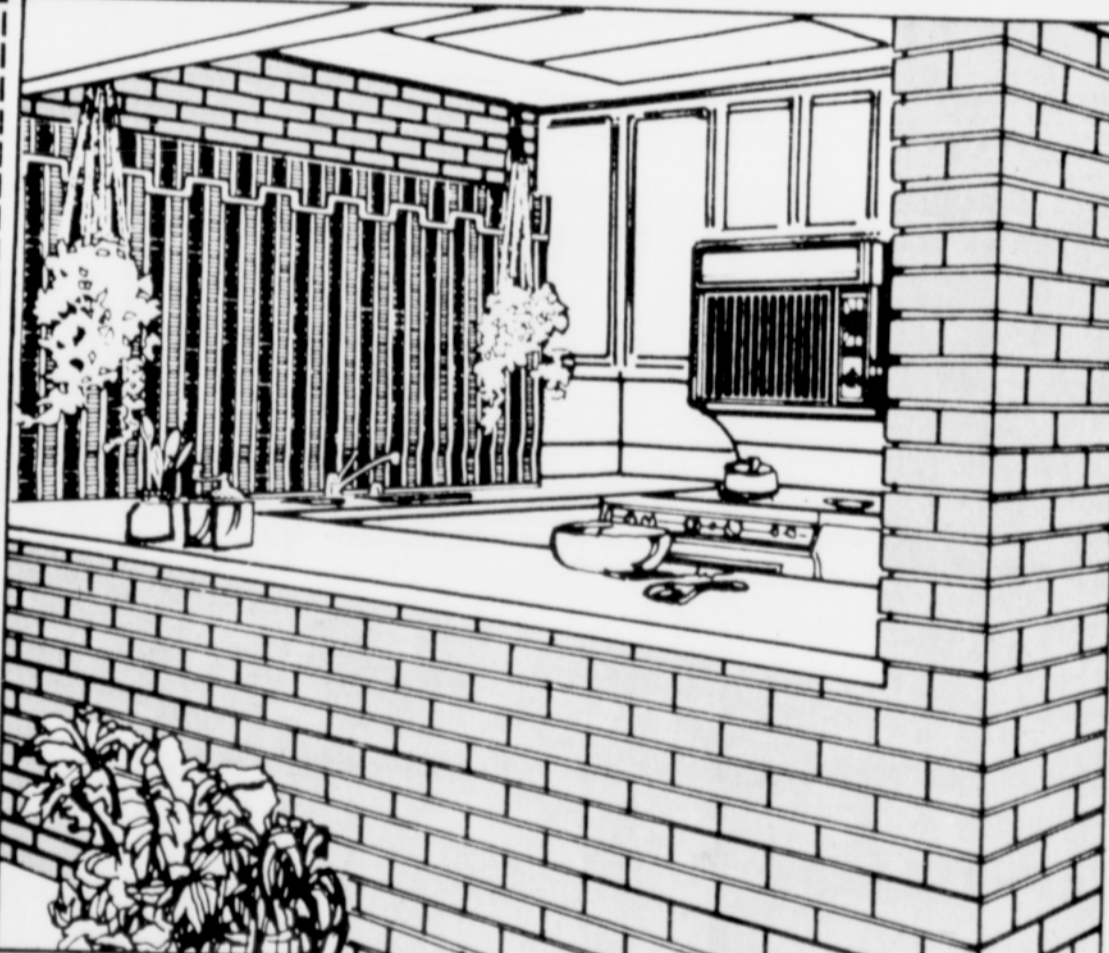
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