

How do Master Gardeners overwinter plants for the Plant Sale?

Jan Smith with Sandra Martis, Sandy Schaufler, and Jane Brizenieks

The key to overwintering is to keep the plant between 27-32 degrees or no colder than 2 zones lower than your hardiness zone. That may sound difficult but many master gardeners have successfully done it. Do we succeed 100% of the time? No, but about 90% of the plants survive which is great. Here are some options used by RAMGA members.



If you are overwintering a few pots and have the space, you can bury the pots in the ground.

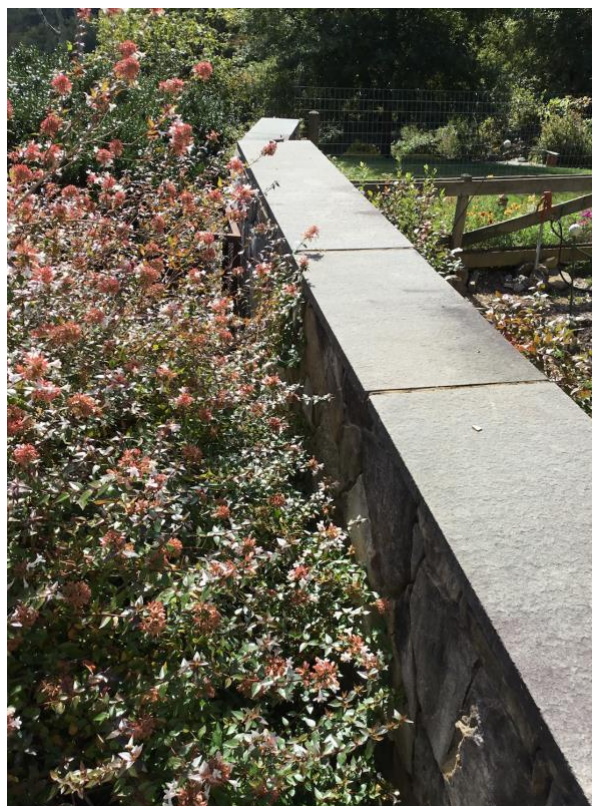
Sandra Martis has soft soil so it is very easy. Her beds are south facing and she does not cover them with leaves. Her dog is making sure the plants are tucked in well. Shade loving potted plants are dug under a tree.

No space? You can always pile leaves between your house and your foundation shrubs and tuck pots in there.

Jane Birzenieks tucked plants behind her shrubs and the retaining wall similar to tucking them along the foundation of your house. Note; Her shrubs weren't quite so large when she was overwintering the pots from her Dig.

WATER THE POTS WELL IN LATE FALL/EARLY WINTER. Fall can be very dry so do a good water before you put them to bed.

EARLY SPRING IS TRICKY. Warm days but cold nights. Don't take out of the leaves/ground too early. And if it is warm but very dry, you might need to water. Feel free to ask Dig and Divide.



Sandy Schaufler overwinters her pots on the ground in an area that is protected from her hilltop winds with shrubs on one side, a greenhouse, a shed (not pictured) and her parked truck.



Do you have a lot of pots to overwinter? Try along a long a hedgerow or fence line.

I overwinter lots of pots for the plant sale. First I lay down a 3-4" layer of Boxerwood leaves, then I put the pots in that layer with the pots touching to keep them warm. Then I put another 3-4" of leaves all around the pots and hold them in place with fencing or empty soil bags full of leaves. I don't bury the pots in the leaves as this could cause rot. This spring, Wanda helped trim and weed the plants.



THE KEY IS INSULATION: If you bury the pots, then the soil is the insulation. If you put them on the ground, then straw or lots of leaves are the insulation (leaves free at Boxerwood).

DON'T SMOTHER THE PLANTS with the leaves or straw. They will want some moisture. Snow is a good insulator.

Some articles suggest putting pots in an unheated garage or shed. You need to periodically check the moisture and water but sparingly to avoid rot. I don't know anyone who has done that.