



JAMES E HENDRY CHAPTER  
of the AMERICAN HIBISCUS SOCIETY

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HIBISCUS CARE SHEET FOR YOUR PLANTS

The hibiscus you have just acquired are good performers, both in the ground and in containers. If they receive just a moderate amount of care they reward us with many magical blooms throughout the year. When you get home, unwrap your plants as soon as possible and allow them to adjust to the atmosphere of their new home. Keep your plants in a partly shaded area for a couple of weeks before putting them in direct sunlight. A few yellow leaves are normal. If they are dry, water them. If they are moist, allow them to dry somewhat before watering. In general, here's what your plants need:

**REPOTTING** - After a few days you can repot new plants to a slightly larger, container with multiple holes drilled in the bottom for good drainage. Try to avoid over potting or changing the pot size more than one step at a time. In other words, if the plant is in a two gallon pot, the next step up should be a 3 gallon pot. Equally important is good potting soil with lots of drainage potential. A basic potting mix is 3 - parts Potting Soil to 1 - Part Perlite. When you repot don't transplant too deep. The roots should be just below or at the soil level. Don't pack the potting mix around the roots as they are very tender and can be damaged easily. Water the soil well and it will settle around the root but DO NOT let the plant sit in a saucer with standing water. Dry is better than too wet. A week or so after repotting, begin to fertilize. If planting in the ground, be sure the hole and location are such that water will not build up around the roots of the plants. Apply at least a three inch layer of mulch to the hibiscus bed. Mulch helps maintain a more constant level of soil moisture, provides shade from the hot sun for the plant and roots, prevents weeds and supplies a constant source for renewal of organic matter as it decomposes.

**FEEDING** - In order to maintain a healthy hibiscus that blooms a lot, you must feed it. Purchase a good quality plant food and use it regularly according to directions on the label. Look at the label for what are often called "minors" such as iron, copper, manganese, and other minerals as these are also beneficial for hibiscus. A constant feed program using a slow release granular long-acting fertilizer as well as a liquid feeding program is recommended. Soil should be moist before applying any liquid fertilizer to prevent damage to the plant. The hibiscus growers' saying is "Fertilize weekly, weakly". Palm fertilizers can also be used for hibiscus; make sure the center number is low and that the last number is higher for best results (i.e. 8-2-12).

**TEMPERATURE** - A warm place where their tropical origins are respected is most important. For best results and lots of blooms, hibiscus should be located where the temperature remains between 60 and 90 degrees most of the time. Short periods of either hot or cold will not injure them though they may show their displeasure by shedding a few leaves or dropping some developing flower buds. If temperatures routinely drop below 50 degrees particularly at night, most growth and blooming will stop until it warms up again. Flower size will become much smaller and the occasional blooms may also be misshapen. Temperatures below freezing will injure hibiscus. Factors such as how cold and for how long, the age of the plant, and whether it is dehydrated determine how extensive the damage.

Under 30 degrees for many hours will most likely kill the plant entirely. Temperatures over 95 degrees will often cause most flower buds to drop off. Hibiscus can survive temperatures even as high as 115 degrees, provided they have adequate water. When the weather is hot, it is best to maintain a steady supply of water to the plant, rather than have it go through wet/dry cycles.

**SUNLIGHT** – Hibiscus need 12 hours of sunlight each day, with morning sun preferred. Hibiscus can be planted under palms or trees which provide shade during the hottest parts of the day, as long as you ensure that the plant receives at least 2 hours of direct sun during the day. Eastern or southern exposures will provide the best conditions for your hibiscus. Different varieties have different sunlight needs; some will perform well in almost full sun, while others need more shade, especially during the hottest summer months. If you maintain your plants in pots, you can move them to different spots in the garden to ascertain the ideal sunlight exposure.

**WATERING** - Watering is divided into two areas - cold weather and hot weather watering. In hot weather, hibiscus will use lots of water and prefer a steady supply of it. Avoid flooding the roots or allowing the plant to stand in a saucer full of water for an extended time. Hibiscus will develop droopy leaves in hot weather if they do not have enough water. The cure is simple, provide some water, and the leaves will regain their crispness. In cold weather, there is a danger of fungus disease attacking the roots of the hibiscus. Avoid this problem in colder weather by watering only as much as the plant needs. It is better to let it get too dry than to over water it. This is one of the few things that will cause the early death of a hibiscus plant. If you can keep the roots warm, you will have few problems with this.

**PEST CONTROL** - Defend your hibiscus against insects as necessary. Many insects can be driven away simply by spraying the plant with a water hose or placing it in the shower for a few minutes. There are other safe treatments that a good nurseryman or those who are well versed in hibiscus culture can advise you about. If you choose to use a chemical pesticide, be sure to follow the directions on the label.

**PRUNING** – Pruning results in more branches which results in more flowers. It also allows you to shape the plant. In Southwest Florida, the time to prune hibiscus is late February. You do not want to prune when a frost is likely as the frost can kill tender new growth. Remember, blooms grow on new growth, not old growth. After you prune, it will be 6-8 weeks before a pruned branch will produce a new bloom.

For more detailed information, join our Society. The James E. Hendry Chapter of the AHS meets at 1:30 PM on the second Sunday afternoon in September, October, November, January, February, March and April at the Fort Myers-Lee County Garden Council Building, located at 2166 Virginia Avenue, Fort Myers.. In December we have a Holiday Dinner, and a picnic in May. Visit our website for updated times and places for all our events.