

Take Precautions When Hauling Plants

by Daniel E. Mullins*

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Hauling plants home from the nursery or garden center seems like a simple procedure; just load them up and go. Unfortunately, many flowers, shrubs and trees are being damaged on the trip.

Last week I met a pickup truck with two large specimen plants in the back. They were in containers, with the tops extending two to three feet above the cab. They were being thoroughly "aired out" at interstate speed.

Hauling plants unprotected, on a hot, bright day can severely dry out the foliage and stems. This kind of damage is frustrating to a gardener because the effects of severe desiccation can be both immediate and long term. Small, herbaceous flower and vegetable plants show signs of damage within a day or two. Typical signs include the browning of leaf tips and margins. In severe cases, entire leaves and even stems turn brown and die.

Shrubs and trees with thicker leaves and more woody stems generally don't show signs of damage right away, and symptoms of plant weakness might not show up for weeks. Severe wind burn sometimes results in the partial or complete defoliation of plants. When this happens, the plants must redirect stored food to produce a new set of leaves, instead of concentrating it's energy on root development following transplanting.

Avoiding wind burn and dried out plants is easy, given some planning and attention to detail:

- When shopping, make plant purchases last so that they are in your vehicle for the shortest time possible.
- Haul plants during the cooler times of the day, or during cloudy, rainy periods.
- Load the most tender and delicate plants so that they are exposed to no wind, if possible. Place them inside of the car or in a covered truck bed.
- Even large shrubs and trees should be protected during transport. Use a covered truck or a temporary cover, such as a tarpaulin.
- Remove the covering material or plants from the vehicle as soon as possible.
- Place the plants in a partially shaded location and water them thoroughly. Allow several hours for them to take up the water and recover from the ride before planting.

All of these precautions might appear to be extreme, but I assure you that they are not. Research has revealed for example, that when annual bedding plants are exposed to a stressful period while in their original containers they don't reach their full potential after

transplanting.

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Question of the Week: My Hibiscus plants are recovering from winter and are growing rapidly, but they aren't flowering. What is wrong with them?

Answer: Be patient. The Hibiscus is a late spring and summer flowering perennial.

Note: Some Hibiscus cultivars are more cold hardy than others, and there have been varying degrees of winter damage. In some cases, plants have been killed to the ground. Many will recover by sprouting from the crown. Wait for several more weeks before giving them up for dead. You might be surprised at how quickly that they can sprout new growth and flower once warm weather arrives.

For more information about gardening in our area, visit the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension website at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>.

[\[Back\]](#)