Summer vacations often mean extended time away from home. Be sure vacation plans include care of special plants. Some plants are adapted to low care and can go on auto-pilot for a week or so. Sometimes, special care is needed to nurse your plants along while you are gone.

When thinking about leaving your prize plants in the care of a friend, realize that there are risks involved. Just as no one takes care of your children the way you do, no one will care for plants exactly as you do. It is not that no one else can be trusted; they just may provide a different level of care than you expect. Unfortunately, this may mean over-watering or under-watering. Some plants are tolerant of too much or not enough tender loving care and may do fine during your absence, others may suffer a bit.

Make life easier for your plant care assistant by leaving detailed instructions of your plants’ special needs. Don’t assume they know when your plants should be watered. Write it down.

And don’t forget to thank your plant sitter, as you would a baby sitter. After all, they will try their best to care for members of your plant family.

Containerized plants should be watered so as to thoroughly wet the soil and drain away. Don’t let plants sit in a tray of water. The roots are likely to develop disease and rot. Instead, to reduce the chances of over-watering, put a layer of gravel in the saucer under the pot. Set the plant on the gravel to allow water to drain through. The excess water in the gravel increases humidity around the plant as it evaporates from the saucer and slows water use by the plant, stretching time between waterings.

If you take plants to the kitchen sink to water them, go ahead and put them there for the duration of your vacation. It will make watering easier for your plant caregiver.

Houseplants can also be moved to the bathtub where they can be showered down and watered thoroughly. Set plant pots on stones or upside down bowls to raise them off the bottom of the tub then leave a small amount of water in the tub. The extra humidity helps reduce water loss. Be sure there is adequate light from a window or indoor lighting.

Patio plants are often large and hard to move indoors. Rolling plant trays make the job easier. If you don’t want to move them indoors, group plants together to keep humidity high and reduce wilt.

Consider planting large specimens in self watering pots. This type of container has a tray or reservoir that holds water and allows the soil to slowly absorb moisture from below. There is usually a clear window opening or dip stick so you can monitor the water level in the reservoir. You only need to add water every few weeks or so.

Some gardeners grow water loving plants such as African violets and gloxinias in self watering ceramic pots. The inner pot of unglazed ceramic nestles in a glazed pot that holds water. The inner pot wicks water from the outer pot providing moisture for a long period of time.

Some violet pots use an absorbent wick to pull moisture from water in a plant saucer. The wick, a piece of cotton string, has one end buried in the potting soil and the other end in the plant saucer. Many plants can nurse water from a common container such as a tray or tub of water. Strips of cotton T shirt work as wicks, too. Be creative and try this with other houseplants when you repot them. Then test them to see how long they can go between waterings.

You can also create a mini greenhouse to keep plants moist for long periods of time. Water plants thoroughly, then seal them in clear plastic. Clear dry cleaning bags or grocery bags seal in moisture,
increase humidity and create a self-contained terrarium-like growth chamber. Be sure you place bagged plants in a bright location. Avoid direct sunlight which will cook them. Plants recycle their own oxygen and carbon dioxide so the container can be completely sealed for the duration of your vacation.

Vacations are a great time to unwind. Don’t worry; be happy! Let these long term watering suggestions reduce your plant care worries while you are away.

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