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Houseplants will enjoy a little time outdoors

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Just like people, houseplants love to spend nice days outside. The higher humidity, fresh air and bright light work wonders for their constitution. When you place them outdoors, remember that exposure to full sun can burn foliage, even on sun-loving houseplants. Place your houseplant in morning sun at first and slowly allow it to get used to the sun by increasing exposure to afternoon sun over a period of a few days. Also, don't forget your plant is out there and leave it out on a cold night. Most tropical houseplants can't take temperatures that drop into the low 40s or worse, and it only takes one cold night to ruin the appearance or even kill a prized specimen.

Support your favorite cause or garden club while enhancing your garden.

'Tis the plant sale season, and what better way to stock up on favorite plants while helping a non-profit institution, or your favorite garden club raise funds. There are too many plant sales to mention them all, but here are a few of the biggies you won't want to miss. Lake Washington Technical College features student-grown plants at great prices. Children's Hospital is holding its 88th Annual Plant Sale and every purchase of these top-quality plants helps make sure quality health care is available to all kids. The WSU King County Master Gardener Sale offers a huge selection of natives, perennials, trees and shrubs, fruiting plants and veggie starts, including gazillions of varieties of tomatoes. Kubota Gardens offers specimen maples and conifers. The Seattle Tilth Edible Plant Sale has the best selection of veggie starts anywhere, and when you see the incredible prices on quality trees and shrubs offered at the Plant Amnesty sale, you'll wish you had brought a pickup truck. For information regarding these and many other plant sales, click on the link to the Elizabeth C. Miller Library Web site at ciscoe.com. Or check out Marty Wingate's exhaustive list on the P-I Web site at seattlepi.com/nwgardens/356340.

Grow the humble turnip.

Turnips are native to Siberia, and they're one of the oldest known cultivated foods. There's evidence of prehistoric man eating them raw and they're famous for being one of the veggies that kept poor families fed during the Depression. Plant soon in a sunny, well-limed location where you haven't grown members of the cabbage family in the past couple of years. Work in about a cup of organic vegetable food per 10 row feet and sow the seed 1/4 inch deep, 4 inches apart in rows 12 to 15 inches apart. Keep the seedbed moist and be patient; germination can take up to 20 days. Cover the seedbed with crop row cover to help keep the notorious root maggot at bay. Turnips grow fast, and with a little luck the delicious roots will be sized up and ready to harvest within about two months. Harvest as soon as the roots are about 2 inches long. Turnip roots turn bitter if they experience too much heat, and if the root maggots gain a foothold, you might as well enjoy the delicious greens and throw out the roots. If you like them and want some to store for winter, sow more seeds in early July for fall harvest.

Ciscoe Morris is a King County Master Gardener who regularly gives gardening advice on radio and television. His Web site is ciscoe.com.

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