

How to Harden off Plants for people with jobs

Hardening-Off your Plants: Whenever you start plants inside, you will need to harden-off the plants before planting out. Hardening is 10% about acclimating to temperature and 90% about building resistance to the sun's UV Light. Direct exposure to the sun's UV will cause the leaves to sunburn and turn white.



Proper hardening is not an easy task, especially for people who work outside the home. Most people start out by placing plants in the shade, then moving them to partially sunny areas for an hour or two, and then back into the shade, etc. All it takes is one distraction and you could lose all your plants from sunburn. The small portable greenhouses are all UV-coated to block UV light, so you can't harden in these. Any greenhouse plastic is UV coated to make it last several years in the sun. It has absolutely nothing to do with protecting the plants from UV.

Here's the trick to fool-proof hardening. The first step is to purchase a 10'x10' 4-mil clear plastic dropcloth from Home Depot or any paint store. Make sure it is at least 3-mil thick material, and it can be clear or translucent. Greenhouse film blocks 98%-99% of UV light, while normal poly film blocks significantly less. A 4-mil thick clear plastic material will block about 25%-30%, and 6-mil plastic blocks 35%-40% of UV light. Ultraviolet (UV) light is the harmful rays that give you a sunburn at the beach, so the plastic sheet acts like a good sunblock, preventing plants from sunburning. I picked up a roll of 4-mil 84" x 72" clear plastic bags on Craigslist. Depending how many plants you have to harden, I would suggest that you make a plastic covered lean-to. I took a plastic patio table and turned it upside down, then covered it with clear plastic with duct tape. Keep the North side open so you have access to water you plants and good air circulation. Here's an even simpler hardening tent using 2 lawn chairs and some duct tape.



As I started more and more plants, I covered an old 10'x10' \$39.00 screenhouse frame with plastic. Now I use 6-mil translucent plastic covered 10'x20' portable carport frame for my hardening hoop-houses that I picked up on Black Friday for \$125 each.



You don't need deep pockets to grow healthy plants, just resourcefulness, creativity, and persistence. I don't claim to be an expert on anything, but this works for me.