

Potting Soils

Potting | Re-Potting | Soils | Ventilation

If your collection of houseplants is small, the matter of soil need not greatly concern you. Your florist or a local greenhouse will supply the correct mixture at a reasonable price. It's easier to buy a few bushels of earth for potting than it is to mix your own. On the other hand, as interest and the number of plants increase, you will probably want to give the matter more consideration and make sure that each plant has its roots buried in the kind of soil most agreeable to the species.

In The Garden Dictionary..' which, by the way, ought be in every gardener's possession. They cover all types of plants likely to be cultivated in the house. Mixtures 3 and 6, in particular, cover a wide range of requirements. In subsequent descriptions of plants, number will make reference to potting mixtures.

Potting Mixture 1

- For potting rooted cuttings started in sand
- 2 parts sharp sand
- 1 part loam
- 1 part leaf mold (or peat moss for acid^{tolerant} plants)

Potting Mixture 2:

For transplanted seedlings and for cuttings when moved from Mixture 1

- 2 part sharp sand
- 1 part loam
- 1 part leaf mold

Potting Mixture 3

For general potting, especially for such plants as the garden geranium, fuchsias, chrysanthemums, Sansevieria, Pandanus, palms, etc.

- 1 part sharp sand
- 2 parts loam
- 1 part leaf mold or humus
- 1/2 part dried cow manure
- 1 5-inch flower pot full of bone meal to each bushel of the mixture

Potting Mixture 4

For plants requiring more humus than in Mixture 3, such as begonias, many ferns, primulas, etc.

- 2 parts sharp sand
- 2 parts loam
- 2 parts leaf mold or humus 1/2 part dried cow manure
- 1 5-inch flower pot full of bone meal to each bushel of the mixture

Potting Mixture 5

For potting many hardwoodcd plants such as azaleas, Ericas,Daphne, and certain ferns

- 2 parts sharp sand
- 2 parts loam
- 2 parts peat moss
- 1 part leaf mold or humus
- 1/3 part dried cow manure

Potting Mixture 6

For most cacti and succulents

- 2 parts sharp sand
- 2 parts loam
- 1 part broken flower pots or soft brick broken into small pieces
- 1/2 part leaf mold or humus
- 1 5-inch flower pot of bone meal to each bushel of the mixture
- 1 5-inch flower pot of limestone (ground) to each bushel of the mixture

With material for preparing these mixtures on hand in the garage or tool shed you are ready for any eventualities as potting is concerned. Irrespective of the labor it is a source of great satisfaction to the deeply interested gardener to know that he is giving his plants the best start; and the plants show their appreciation with foliage and more numerous blossoms.

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POTTING

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It is preferable always to use clean flowerpots. If old pots are reused, be sure that any soil adhering to the inside walls is entirely removed. Dirty containers make re-potting difficult, as the ball of dirt does not slip out readily. Then, too, tender feeding roots resent ancient, caked residue. New clay pots must be soaked in water for at least hours, and a whole week is better; then dry them off before using. Otherwise the thirsty clay insists upon absorbing moisture which is essential in starting newly potted plants into healthy growth.

The condition and species of plant will determine the proper time for potting. The best time is just after a plant has started into growth. Then it is easier for the roots to withstand the shock of transplanting. When plants are resting (during the winter, usually), and root action is correspondingly dormant, the vitality of a plant is often too low to supply the energy necessary for roots to take hold of the soil and establish the plant in its new home, so it is apt to languish and die. Most houseplants rest during the late autumn and early winter months, awakening into new growth in the spring. March, April, and May, then, are good potting or re-potting months for such plants. The end of a resting period may usually be determined by appearance of new green shoots and a general freshening in the whole appearance of the plant.

Plants potted in the spring should be plunged in the garden, where they enjoy a refreshing and invigorating season before taking up their duties in the house. Place some gravel under each pot and sink it to the brim. The additional drainage will dispose of overflow from exuberant summer showers, and it will also discourage earth worms from crawling into the pot through the bottom hole. The process of summering in the garden applies to most houseplants, as well as those just recently potted. A few temperamental species, like the African Violet (*Saintpaulia*), prefer to remain inside or on a protected porch. The finicky varieties will be discussed later. Cacti and succulents enjoy the sunniest place in the garden; other plants require light shade, and ferns need the cool dimness of rather heavy shade not, however, where they will encounter drip from trees or bushes.

It is necessary to leave houseplants in their pots during the summer season in the garden.

A common tendency, when potting plants, is to use too large a container. This fault is provocative of over watering, sour soil, and an early demise of the plant. Plants that continue to live under these circumstances just about hold their own; they seldom increase in size or show any signs of active growth. Also, many species stubbornly refuse to produce flowers unless their roots are somewhat pot bound. This is commonly the case with *Amaryllis*, *Hippeastrum*, *Clivia*, *Agapanthus*, snake plant (*Sansetderia*), and jade plant (*Crassula portulacea*). There is nothing to be gained by giving a plant more soil than its roots need or can use. Many varieties, which you will eventually want to grow in your house, may be seen in florists' windows or greenhouses. Look closely at them sometime when you are passing by. Note that four or five sizable cacti are thriving in a 3 inch 4 foot palms in 8 inch pots, and 6 foot rubber plants in 10-inch pots. Observation of the material in these windows will give you an excellent idea of the proper size in pots for various plants. If any doubt exists in your mind while in the process of potting, under pot, rather than over pot; it is much safer, and usually you will find that you really haven't used too small a container, after all.

Another planting "must" is firm soil about the roots. After placing the drainage layer in a pot, it should be filled about one quarter full with dampened soil, and the roots spread out on top of the earth in a natural position—not bent or cramped. Then add more potting mixture to within an inch of the container's rim. The whole is firmly compressed about the roots. With small pots, soil may be pressed down with the thumbs. When large pots are used, a section of broom handle makes a good tamping stick. Firm soil does not mean earth pounded down to the consistency of a brick! Such a condition prevents circulation of water and air, and invites curtailment of normal, healthy growth. There is a happy medium, which your own sense of judgment will determine.

Water well after planting; if the specimen is other than a cactus, succulent, or downy leafed plant like *Gloxinia* or *Saintpaulia*, it will also appreciate having its foliage sprayed.

When plants are first brought into the house, they should be kept in dim light no sun, for several days or a while they adjust themselves. This also applies to newly potted or re-potted plants.

Too much emphasis cannot be placed upon the importance of thorough drainage. More trouble has arisen through different attention to this detail than you can imagine. Water is most essential to plant life, of course, for it is through agency that food in the soil is made available to roots. Yet, without proper drainage, water becomes an enemy rather than a friend; it packs and sours soil, at the same time excluding all air, which is also a requisite for roots. Sweet, friable soil and healthy plants are boon companions. Although a drainage hole is incorporated in the bottom of most flowerpots, this alone is insufficient. If nothing but soil is placed in

the container, water soon washes it into the hole where it forms an impenetrable plug and all drainage stops. The hole is assisted in the performance of its duties by guardian pieces of broken pot, over which is placed a layer of pebbles or gravel. This drainage stratum varies in thickness according to the size the pot; it is always deeper in glazed containers which have no bottom holes.

The use of saucers or supplementary vessels is universal. They protect table and shelf tops and serve to catch surplus water vented through drainage holes. It is sound procedure to fill them partly with pebbles. Then no harm can come to the plant if some overflow remains in the saucer, as it very often does, for the bottom of the pot is held above the water. In fact, under these circumstances, surplus water is a decided asset, as it adds to the moisture content of surrounding air. A few pieces of charcoal mixed in with the pebbles will keep saucer and contents clean.

Re-potted plants, and those, which have summered in the garden, react to the change in atmosphere when they are returned to the house. For several months they have been accustomed to fresh air, undiluted, untainted, and abundant air of a character different from that usually found in a house. Perhaps you can't notice the difference, but plants do the transposition affects them in various ways, all unfavorable. Leaving as many windows open as possible for a week or two may materially lessen the shock; it enables plants to gradually readjust themselves to house conditions.

Fresh air, as a matter of fact, is a constant requisite. during the coldest winter months a window should be opened daily for five or ten minutes morning and afternoon not, however, where it will subject plants to a direct draft. Supply fresh air from the side of a room opposite to the plants if possible; if not, use a window in the next room and leave the connecting door open. Here, again, common sense is a valuable ally, for many species are tender and will succumb to a single blast of frigid air blowing directly upon them. They require gradual, rather than abrupt, refreshing of atmosphere; every indoor garden will require individual consideration of the fresh air problem.

As most plants welcome a lower room temperature at night than during the day, a distant window in the room may be raised a fraction during the night. The existing temperature outside will gauge the size of the opening, of course.

Frost has a stealthy habit of reaching right through glass windowpanes and injuring or destroying plants. On very cold nights, specimens in or near windows should be moved back or guarded by placing newspaper placed between them and the window. This is particularly true of plants whose extended branches and leaves actually touch the glass.

In early spring, when bright sun may be supplanted suddenly by cold rain, and temporary warmth by frosty winds, over zealous gardeners lose many houseplants by placing them out of doors. Don't set your plants outside—even on the porch or steps until the weather is definitely and dependably warm.