

Repotting Tropicals

WHAT IS "REPOTTING"? This refers to the process of moving a plant into a larger pot to allow continued root development.

WHEN SHOULD I REPOT MY PLANTS? The best time to repot or transplant is at the beginning of an active growing season (in the spring). Occasionally, it is necessary to repot a plant that has outgrown its pot at other times of the year.

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY PLANT NEEDS REPOTTING? As a general rule, the main function of soil is to hold the plant, so it can take up water and nutrients. Therefore, as long as the plant is growing well in its existing pot, there is no need to change the pot or the soil. (If you would like a more attractive container, you can simply set your present pot inside a decorative cache pot. This is sometimes called false planting.) If you are purchasing a new plant for your home, please feel free to ask one of our staff when it will need to be repotted.

To see if your plant should be repotted, remove it from the pot to check its roots. Hold your hand over the soil around the base of the plant and tip the pot onto its side.

Gently squeeze or tap the sides of the pot to loosen the roots and soil and pull carefully on the plant to remove it from the pot. If the pot is clay, use the small end of a wooden spoon to push the plant away from the bottom of the pot. If there are more roots than soil in the pot, it's time to repot.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I TRANSPLANT MY PLANTS? To find out if a particular type of houseplant likes to be pot-bound (more roots than soil, or roots creeping out of the holes in the pot), refer to a good gardening book. Many flowering plants will bloom better if their roots are cramped. Hoya is one example. Others, like Hibiscus and Gardenia, will benefit from being repotted in early spring (March or April), although repotting plants while they are in bloom is not recommended. Slow-growing plants need to be repotted less frequently. Cacti and succulents often do well for several years in the same pot. Use a houseplant fertilizer such as GARDENWORKS 20-20-20 during active growth periods (April to October) to provide adequate nutrients to the soil.

WHAT SIZE POT DOES MY PLANT NEED? Repot your plant into a pot one size larger. For example, move from a 4-inch-diameter (10-cm) pot to a 6-inch (12.5-cm) pot. There should be no more than 1 to 1.5 inches (2.5 to 4 cm) of new soil around the root ball.

SHOULD I USE CLAY OR PLASTIC? The choice is yours as long as the container has adequate drainage (holes in the bottom are critical). Some gardeners put broken pottery shards or drain rock in the bottom of the pot before adding soil; this prevents the soil from escaping out the drain holes.

DO I NEED SPECIAL SOIL? Yes, use indoor potting soil that has been sterilized or composted to help prevent pests and disease from developing. There are different types of pre-mixed soils available, all of which are well suited to certain varieties of plants. Be sure to press down the new soil in the pot so water will not collect in the air spaces when you water the plant. Use GARDENWORKS transplanter fertilizer 5-15-5 when you water to reduce the probability of transplant shock to the plant and encourage healthy new root development. Happy planting!

A BRIEF NOTE ON ORCHIDS

Orchids can be divided into two types according to growing site: terrestrial (growing on the ground) and epiphytic (growing on trees, shrubs or rock surfaces).

Containers: Terrestrial orchids are normally grown in standard pots. The epiphytic kinds can also be planted in conventional containers, but they tend to do better in special, perforated clay pots, in slatted wooden or wire baskets, or attached to sections of tree branch or slabs of bark.

Soil Mix: All mixtures used for growing orchids must be free-draining. Grow potted terrestrial orchids in a mixture of equal parts of fibrous loam, leaf mould or peat moss, chopped sphagnum moss, and perlite. For these orchids, it is far easier to buy an orchid mix than mix your own.

