

Repotting Tropicals

WHAT IS REPOTTING?

It's 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's 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?

The main function of soil is to provide support for the plant, so it can take up water and nutrients. As long as your plant is happily growing in its pot, there is no need for repotting. But if you have a plant in a simple plastic pot and you are looking to change it to a new more decorative container, then consider false-planting or pot-in pot. This is when you simply place the plastic pot into the decorative pot. If you are picking up a new plant for your home, talk to one of our knowledgeable staff for more information about 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?

Some indoor tropical plants prefer to be pot-bound, this is when there are more roots than soil, or roots creeping out of the holes in the pot. Do a bit of research or ask around and find out what makes your plant happy. Many flowering plants will bloom better if their roots are cramped, hoyo for example. Others, like hibiscus and gardenia, will benefit from being repotted in early spring (March or April), although generally speaking repotting plants when 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.

WHAT SIZE POT DOES MY PLANT NEED?

Repot your plant into a pot one size larger.

For example, move from a 4" diameter (10cm) pot to a 6" (12.5cm) pot. There should be no more than 1" to 1.5" (2.5cm to 4cm) 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, drain rock, or mesh in the bottom of the pot before adding soil to prevent the soil from escaping out the drain holes. This is not necessary but some people do prefer it. Do be aware that soil in clay pots will tend to dry out much faster than plastic due to its porous nature.

DO I NEED SPECIAL SOIL?

Yes, you need to use indoor potting soil that has been sterilized to prevent pests and disease from developing. There are different types of premixed soils available, all of which are well suited to certain varieties of plants. When potting 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 first water after repotting. It will help to reduce transplant shock and encourage the growth of healthy new roots. And always remember to feed your indoor tropicals regularly using a specially formulated indoor fertilizer during active growth periods (April to October) to make sure you are adding nutrients to the soil.

GARDENWORKS

Pruning Know-How

CEDAR HEDGING

Light pruning at any time of the year is fine for coniferous hedges and plantings, but heavy pruning (with the exception of yews) is not recommended as cedar hedging has a “dead zone” inside the plant. Even if light reaches the area, there are no growth buds to facilitate growth, these evergreens cannot “break buds” on old wood. So, if you prune too hard you will be left with an open unattractive “dead hole” in your hedging.

ROSES & CLEMATIS

Refer to our specific care sheets on both roses and clematis to learn more about their special pruning requirements.

TOOLS

Used for pruning branches that are smaller than 2cm (3/4”) thick. A good pair of pruners are a gardeners best friend so they should always be kept clean and out of the soil (soil granules will dull the blades). Never force a pruner to cut, as in using both hands to squeeze down on the handles. If you need to use force, the branch you are trying to cut is too big and you need to use lopping shears.

HAND SHEARS

This tool is used for shaping hedges and shearing formal shrubs. Select shears that are durable as well as lightweight, since this kind of work takes time and is repetitive. Try extending your arm with shears in hand to estimate the weight, and imagine spending hours with it extended.

LOPPING SHEARS

These long-handled pruners provide more leverage to cut wood up to 3cm (1.25”) in thickness. The heavy-duty, double action and ratchet types can easily handle wood up to 4.5cm (1.75”).

PRUNING SAWS

These are used for pruning heavier branches, 5cm (2”) and larger in thickness. Unlike a carpenter’s saw, a pruning saw cuts on “pull” rather than on “push.” Pruning saws can be purchased in a foldable form for added safety or with a holster to attach to your belt.

HOW TO PRUNE

Before you make the first cut, always picture in your mind how the plant will look without that particular limb. A good old adage is think twice and cut once, since it’s hard to put the branch back on the plant. When pruning, always prune to either the next growth bud that is facing outwards (away from the centre of the plant) or to the junction where the limb meets the plant. NEVER leave a stub. Stubs are an access point for diseases and infection, but also it looks bad.

Always cut out dead, diseased or damaged materials first (the 3 Ds). Trace the dead branch or limb back to live wood (check by gently scraping the bark to see if the layer underneath is white or light green) then cut just below that point at a growth bud.

Next prune out all crossing branches. Crossing branches will become large limbs that will rub against each other and cause damage to the plant in the future.

Always remember to take time and stand back to check your work, a good look at the plant from a distance can help you to know when to stop. For ornamental deciduous shrubs and trees, the branches should be encouraged to grow outwards. This allows good light penetration and air flow. Prune out branches that tend to grow inwards.

THE SAFE WAY TO REMOVE LARGE LIMBS

If in doubt ask for help from a certified arborist. If the branches you want to remove are a manageable size then follow these directions. First reduce the size of your branch to a manageable and safe level by removing several small pieces with your pruning saw, then make an upward cut halfway through the branch at position A (see diagram below). Trim the branch at position B to remove the branch, and make your final clean cut at position C.