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# REPOTTING HOUSEPLANTS 101

*As plants grow, they need more room*

by **MARTY JONES** • photography by **CHARLES TOWNSEND BESSENT**

**W**ITH SNOW COVERING garden beds and perennial plants outside your home, winter is the time to turn your love of plants indoors and give houseplants some extra attention. Houseplants add fresh bursts of color, interesting textures, and even unique design elements to

a home. Plus, plants also have the ability to filter impurities from the air we breathe.

Many common varieties of houseplants require little maintenance. Once you have placed them in locations where they receive optimal light conditions for their type and water them according to their

needs, you can sit back and enjoy the way they enhance your home. But as houseplants grow, they need to be repotted into progressively larger pots so that their roots do not become cramped. Here's how to do this simple maintenance task to keep houseplants in top shape this winter.

## **Know When to Repot**

How often you'll need to repot houseplants depends on how quickly they grow, and it's also possible to repot anytime you're ready to update a plant's pot for a fresh, new look. To determine whether or not it's necessary, check the roots to see if the plant is rootbound, or constricted by the





WHEN CHOOSING A POT,  
SELECT A NEW POT THAT  
IS APPROXIMATELY TWO  
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THAN THE CURRENT POT.

pot. If white roots are starting to protrude from the pot's drainage holes, or if roots are beginning to appear at the surface of the soil, then the plant is likely rootbound.

Check to see if the entire plant is rootbound by holding the planted pot in one hand and tilting it to the side. With your other hand, carefully slide the plant out of the pot. If it is stuck inside of the pot, use a knife or trowel to slice around the inner edge of the pot to loosen the soil, or tap your hand along the outside of the pot to release its contents before trying again. Once you've slid the plant outside of the pot, check the roots. You'll know it's rootbound and ready to repot if white roots are tightly coiled around the soil mass and wrapped back on themselves. It's a good idea to repot a houseplant before it gets entirely rootbound, and plants with dense, white root systems are also ready to repot.

#### Gather Repotting Supplies

Once you've determined it's time to repot, begin by gathering these necessary supplies:

- A new pot
- A small trowel
- Scissors or knife
- Potting soil
- Gloves
- Water

Supplies listed here generally apply to all repotting tasks, but a few more details must also be considered. When choosing a pot, select a new pot that is approximately two inches larger in diameter than the current pot, and use potting soil specific to the type of plant you are potting. Orchids and violets, for example, require specific types of potting soil, whereas general foliage houseplants will grow well in an all-purpose potting mix.

Prepare a repotting space by spreading newspaper out along



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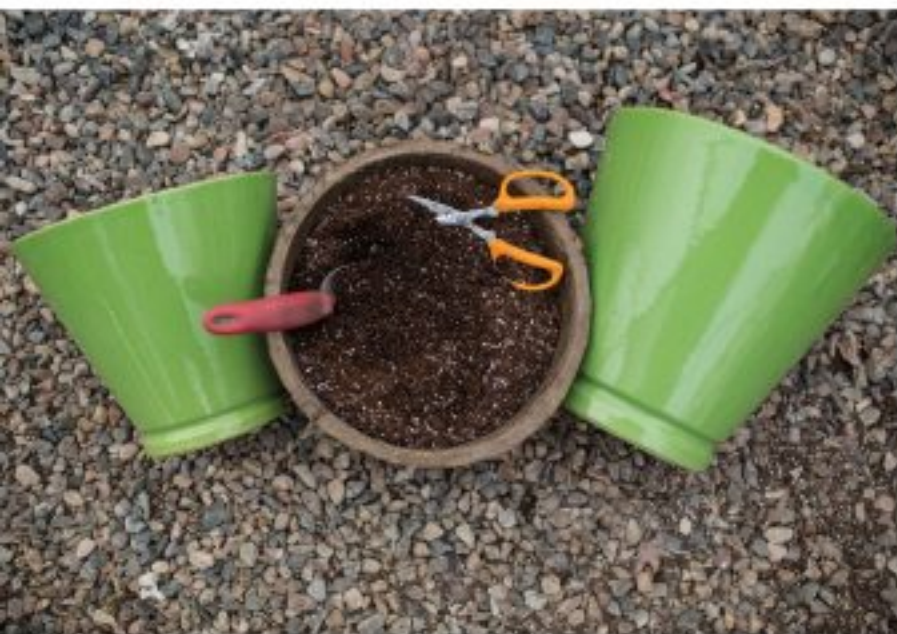


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a table or workbench to make the cleanup process easier, and wear gloves to protect your hands while also keeping them clean. Lightly water the plant about an hour before repotting to help the plant's roots and soil slide out of the pot more easily.

#### **Transferring the Plant**


If you've already loosened the plant to check its roots, simply slide the plant out of the old container. Use scissors or a clean, sharp knife to prune roots before adding to the plant to the new pot. Use your fingers to pull coiled roots from the sides and the bottom of the plant, and then trim them to help promote new root growth.

Add potting soil to the bottom of the new pot, and adjust the soil level to allow the plant to sit about an inch from the top of the new pot so that it doesn't overflow when watered. Center the new plant in the pot, and then add potting soil around the sides until it is securely in place. Use your fingers to compress the new soil slightly,

but don't pack it in too tight. Water the new container to help the plant and potting mix settle into place, and if the soil level drops considerably when water is added, then add a bit more soil to the top.

#### **Ongoing Houseplant Care**

Repotted plants will normally show signs of stress, such as wilting leaves, when repotted. Direct sunlight can further stress newly potted plants, so keep them in a location where they'll receive indirect light for a few days until they rebound, and then move them back into the original location so that they can slowly readjust to optimal growing conditions. Water repotted plants as usual, but wait for about a month before fertilizing repotted plants, as pruned roots are sensitive.

Houseplants may take a few weeks to recover from repotting, but the process will allow them additional room to grow and thrive throughout this winter season and in years to come. 



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