

POTTING IN CONTAINERS

GETTING PREPARED:

If you have container plants, then you probably know that they have special needs that have to be considered, especially when you're first planting them.



The main difference between a plant that's set into a container and one that's put into the ground is the amount of soil surrounding the root system. In a container, the soil is very limited and that means the soil can run out of nutrients and dry out very quickly. Also, if proper drainage is not available the plant can actually drown in the pot, so water control is very important.

Always select a planter that has a good drainage hole in the bottom. In order to make sure the hole doesn't get plugged up and to prevent soil from washing through, drainage material must be placed in the bottom of the planter.

A common material used is crushed rock, but in the case of large planters we recommend Styrofoam peanuts. They will never rot and are very lightweight, which makes it easier to move the pot around.

SOIL:



When planting container plants, one important thing to remember is that not all soil is created equally. It is very important, especially in container gardens, to use a good quality potting soil. It is also a good idea to further condition the potting soil by adding organic compost to the mix. This will help the soil with the much needed nutrients. Organic compost will release its nutrients over time to be absorbed into the soil and fed to the plant. Remember the larger the plant the faster it will absorb the nutrients from the soil. A routine of fertilizing the plant should be established and maintained. As the plant grows its need for food and water will grow.

PLANTING:

If you are re-planting a plant that is root bound, you should first, break the roots up a little so they will have more room in which to grow. Fill the container with enough soil to line the edges, and then gently set the plant into the center of the container. Then back fill the space between the edge of the root ball and the side of the pot and gently pack it in. Make sure that the top of the soil is down below the rim.

WATERING:

Next, you will need to give the plant some water to help settle the soil and plant into its new home. You will also need to feed it to stimulate the root growth. For this action use the type of fertilizer designed for transplants.



Water clay pots and other porous containers more frequently than plastic or glazed, as they allow additional evaporation from the sides of the pots. Smaller pots also tend to dry out more quickly than larger ones. If the soil appears to be getting excessively dry increase the frequency of watering. Check containers at least once a day and twice on hot, dry, or windy days. Feel the soil to determine whether it is damp. Mulching can help reduce water requirements for containers. Container plants on decks and patios can dry out very quickly, especially during hot weather. You should check your plants daily and water them as needed, which can be quite frequently. This is a small price to pay for the beauty and pleasure potted plants can give.

FERTILIZING:

Establish regular feedings. Dilute fertilizer into water and then pour the water into the pot. It will fertilize and level out the soil at the same time.

An occasional application of fish emulsion or compost will add trace elements to the soil. Do not add more than the recommended rate of any fertilizer. Doing so may cause fertilizer burn and kill plants. Unlike garden plants, container plants do not have the buffer of large volumes of soil and humus to protect them from over-fertilizing.

Tips for selecting potting soil

Most commercial potting mixes are the seller's best attempt to provide for aeration, water retention and nutrients. Of course, not all commercial soils are the same. The old adage "you get what you pay for" can really come into play here. Avoid inexpensive soils that just say "topsoil" or "compost" on the label. That mysterious topsoil may be anything and could very well be old, tired soil that comes from land that's been farmed to death. Poor topsoil can be completely depleted of nutrients, but rich in nasty chemical pesticides and herbicides, another leftover life down on the farm. Something merely labeled "compost" could very well be made from toxic sludge (often called bio solids) or just ground up wood chips and nothing else. Play it safe and buy quality Organic potting soil.

What is the perfect soil? That depends. Every professional gardener has his own "perfect" recipe just like every Italian grandmother has her own way of making tomato sauce. However, most experts agree that a good container medium should be lightweight and drain well, yet contain enough organic matter to hold moisture and nutrients even through hot, dry weather. Make sure you purchase a quality potting mix.

Note: Ordinary garden soil is not recommended as a potting mix. It's usually too heavy and may contain weed seeds, diseases, and insect pests.