
UNH Cooperative Extension Info Line Question of the Week

Repotting Houseplants

Question: I think my begonia needs a new pot. How can I tell, and what do I do?



A. If you have roots growing out the drainage hole in the bottom of the container, if the roots are twining around the inside of the container when you remove the plant, or if your plant requires frequent watering or wilts between waterings, then it's probably pot-bound. Plants that grow quickly and require frequent re-potting include spider plants, Swedish ivy, philodendron and wandering jew. Some plants, like clivia and amaryllis, actually thrive when pot-bound so be sure to check on your plants' preferences. If you do re-pot, choose a container that's no more than 2 inches larger in size.

To re-pot, you need to turn the plant upside down and remove it from the container. It's much easier to do this if you first run a knife around the inside edge of the pot next to the rootball. This loosens the plant from the pot. Next hold your hand over the soil, straddling the plant between your fingers, holding back the soil. Turn the pot upside down and gently tap the rootball out of the container.

Place a small piece of paper towel over the drainage hole of your new pot, and then place enough potting soil in the bottom of the container so that the rootball comes within an inch of the container's top. The space at the top allows for watering. Fill the remaining space with soil, and then tap the pot to settle the soil, adding more if necessary. Water so that excess water drains out the bottom of the pot, and add more soil if needed.

Got questions? UNH Cooperative Extension Education Center's Info Line offers practical help finding answers for your lawn and garden questions. Call toll free at 1-877-398-4769, M-F, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., or e-mail us at answers@unh.edu