



Learn From the Masters Summary

Repotting Plants

Why do we repot plants? One reason is because over time they can become root bound or overgrow their pot, another is because the soil can become degraded and no longer drain properly. There are other, less frequent reasons, such as a pot breaking or the desire for a better pot for a prized show plant.

What kind of pot to choose when you repot? That will depend on a number of criteria including your watering method, schedule and habits. **Terra cotta pots** are porous and allow your soil to dry out much faster than other pots. The evaporation also cools the pot helping the plant roots from getting cooked in the hot sun. They do require more frequent and through watering. **Glazed pots** are non-porous, retain moisture longer and could be appropriate if you are only able to water infrequently. But care must be taken to not allow the soil to become too wet for too long or rotting might start in the roots. Depending on your own decorating preferences, glazed pots can offer a wide range of styles and colors. Although most are not generally considered desirable for plants entered in a show. **Plastic pots** are widely used because they are inexpensive and readily available in a large number of sizes and shapes. They are non-porous but usually have ample provision for drainage to prevent root rot. They are acceptable in plant shows and supposedly do not effect judges opinions when competing against plants in showier pots. They do absorb heat in the direct sun and can contribute to cooking of plant roots. **Stoneware pots** are generally handmade and very artistically designed. Many prefer them for their show plants. They are strong, durable and have many of the same characteristics as terra cotta, although they are not nearly as porous.

What kind of soil should I use? This is a subject of its own and in this discussion the answer will be limited to just pointing out that most, or all, cactus and succulents prefer a well-drained soil. Using a commercially prepared cactus and palm soil is generally acceptable although many advanced growers prefer to mix their own and even mix it specific to individual plants.

How do I get plants covered with spines out of the old pot and into the new one without damage to my hands?

Using a strap wrapped loosely around the plant can work well for many plant shapes and sizes. The strap can be made of a large variety of materials; folded shade cloth, an old bath towel, cut pile carpeting for instance. It should be about 2"-4" wide and 18"-36" long. Heavy double palm gloves and tongs are also used by some. Handling the plant by the root ball when it is exposed is also a good tactic.

What if my plant is root bound? With many pots just tapping on the sides and then pulling will free the root ball and plant from the pot. With some cheap pots it is easier and faster to cut or break the pot leaving the root ball and plant free. If it is very difficult to remove, because of the pot shape, and you don't want to damage the pot, using a strong flow of water around the inside edges while the pot is lying on its side, to wash out the dirt is a good method to free up the roots so they slide out easily.

Do not leave a pot bound root ball intact when you put your plant in its new pot. Try to maintain the new "white" roots and remove the old dead or dark colored roots. All the circling roots should be removed. While you have your plant out of the pot and the roots are exposed check it for insects and disease, especially mealy bugs. Soaking the entire plant for several hours immersed in plain water with 10% dishwashing soap added will kill most

insects. Some prefer washing the soil completely away from the roots in order to better see their condition and any insects.

When re-potting be careful to not place your plant too low in the pot and to get the soil level correct on the base of your plant. If it is going to be entered in a show it is a good idea to leave room for a topping. The new soil should be **gently** tamped in around the roots to be sure they are all properly covered leaving no air spaces, but it should not be compacted or pounded into the pot. Cleaning the entire plant and removing dead leaves from a succulent is a good idea at the same time you repot it.

Should I water immediately? There are varying opinions about watering a plant after repotting it. Too much water left in a non-porous soil will of course promote root rot, especially when some of the roots have been cut. It generally will not hurt a succulent plant for it to be allowed a period of drying after the roots are disturbed and it is re-potted, but there are those who water immediately.