**Indoor Plant Culture, Part 2**

**Segment for Week of Dec 13, 2021**

This is Julie Callahan bringing you information on shore friendly living and gardening from the Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension. Last week, I talked about purchasing a new indoor plant noting that light exposure and watering needs are two important criteria to consider when deciding on a house plant. This week I will talk about potting your plant: the container and the soil.

When repotting becomes necessary, choose a container about a third larger than the old one to allow room for new roots to grow. And it should allow sufficient room for watering without spilling over the side. If previously used, wash it thoroughly to remove soil and potential contaminants. If you suspect the presence of disease organisms, dip it in a solution of 1 part liquid bleach to 9 parts water and rinse thoroughly.

Containers are made from many materials including plastic, ceramics, and clay. Clay pots are widely used and can be glazed or unglazed. Unglazed pots absorb and lose moisture through their walls. Although easily broken, they provide excellent aeration and are a considered to be the ideal type of container.

If the container has no drainage holes, place another container with drainage holes inside of it. Elevate the inner container about an inch by placing stones or other inorganic material between the containers to collect irrigation water.

Plastic and fiberglass containers are light, easy to handle, relatively inexpensive, and often quite attractive in shape and color. Plastic pots are easy to clean and sterilize for reuse, and, because they are not porous, need less frequent watering.

Contrary to common belief, the practice of putting a layer of gravel or shards under the soil does not improve drainage. Because it reduces the amount of soil in the pot it means less nutrients, water and air for the plant. Additionally, adding sand to a potting mix actually decreases drainage and air space.

There are many commercially available potting soils which are composed of solids (generally including organic and inorganic material such as peat moss and vermiculite or perlite), air space, and water. Potting soils differ in types of components and in the percentages of solids, air, and water. If your plant is fast growing, it needs a “heavy” mix which holds more water allowing less air flow. If it is slow growing, give it a “light” mix which holds more air allowing less water retention. Unfortunately, most potting soil packaging doesn’t show this data, so you will have to experiment to find the best one for your plant. Or make your own by mixing 1 part peat moss, 1 part perlite, 1 part vermiculite, and 1 tablespoon of garden lime per gallon of soil.

For more information or for answers to your questions, contact your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office. Here on the Shore call either 678-7946 or 787-1361