

# homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, October 1, 1941.

Subject: "BRINGING IN GARDEN PLANTS." Information from plant scientists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Bulletin available, "House Plants" No. 1872.

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Fall jobs for the homemaker follow each other thick and fast. Each one seems to need your immediate attention, from outfitting the children for school to getting in the last of the grapes.

One job that you should do a week or so before danger of frost is bringing in whatever plants you want to enjoy in the house during the winter. You'll have to pot them or transplant them to window boxes, and there's little time to lose. Some of the plants, like ferns and palms, will remain in more or less active growth the year around. Others, like the azalea, must have a period of winter rest. Then they'll begin to develop new growth in the early spring. Many of the cacti grow only in summer. If you keep them practically dormant all winter they make very effective house plants. But you have to know how to handle each type of plant.

Plant scientists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture have some tips for you on potting your house plants this fall. First, they say, have your pots all clean and ready for each plant, --- the smallest size pot that will properly hold its root mass. Clean old pots thoroughly before you use them. Use a scrub brush and plenty of hot soapy water to get off old earth, moss, fungus, or traces of insects. Then let them soak up all the clean cool rinse water they will take. Soak new pots, too, for several hours or they may draw moisture from the soil around the plants. However, the surface of the pots should not appear wet when the soil is added.

The day before you start digging your plants water them well. That helps them stand the change better, and also makes digging easier. Spray them with a combined insecticide and fungicide in case they harbor any insects or have any plant



diseases. Dig them with a good ball of earth around the roots, and move them quickly so the roots won't have a chance to dry out in the sun. Add specially prepared soil to fill the pot up to within half an inch of the top and firm it down well.

One very important point: Before you put the plants in the pots, put in each one a few pieces of broken flower pots, or large pebbles, over the hole in the bottom. Then the plant will have good drainage but the soil won't wash out.

Never let the plant stand with "wet feet" in a water-logged pot. If you use saucers under the pots, do not allow water to remain constantly in the saucer. If you set plants in jardinières, raise the pot underneath, and frequently empty out any water that accumulates. You may like to arrange your plants on a table with casters so you can push them about from one location to another. Have a shallow pan under the pots the exact size of the shelf or table top. Fill it with gravel and set the pots on that. To draw off surplus moisture, after the plants are watered, have a small tap soldered on one end of the pan.

As to the soil to use for potted plants, plant scientists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture recommend a good general purpose greenhouse compost made up of about three-fourths loamy soil and one-fourth well decomposed animal manure, thoroughly mixed together. If it's too heavy, add a little sand. Put some bonemeal or chemical plant food in each pot from time to time.

The best place for most house plants is a sunny window facing south. If you have a bow or bay window that will provide the plants sun on three sides, that's ideal. Don't take up valuable southern exposure for foliage plants that do just as well in the shade, or for plants that are inactive and need to rest with only diminished light. If you like your plants on hanging shelves across a window, leave space at the bottom for raising the window without having a draft strike the plants.



Some like to have their house plants in indoor window boxes. The chief disadvantages of window boxes are that they are heavy to handle when filled with soil, and you can only give the plants two exposures--reversing the box from front to back. You can move pots around to any position to give the plants more sunshine on all sides, or even take them into another room as the sun moves. When blooming is over you can replace a potted plant with another that's in flower. Another drawback to window boxes is that different plants need different conditions of moisture and light, so the box is limited to those kinds that have similar needs.

Indoor care of your house plants includes not only watering them when they need it, but an occasional mild soap and water bath for the leaves-- particularly those with large, broad leaves that catch dust and grit. Lay the plants gently on their sides and sponge the leaves with absorbent cotton dipped in soapy water. Then rinse them with a cool, gentle spray, using a laundry sprinkler or shampoo spray. Don't let soapy water drain down into the soil.

While we've been talking entirely about bringing indoors the plants you already have in your garden, you may like to get some ideas on other good houseplants. You can send to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, at Washington, D.C. for a copy of Farmers' Bulletin 1872, House Plants. This bulletin is free while the supply lasts. It describes such foliage plants as ferns, ivies, small palms and evergreens, coleus, and many kinds of cacti. Aspidistra and sanseveria are two especially useful plants for indoors because they will stand almost any treatment-- heat, dust, darkness, and lack of water-- though of course, like all plants, they will do better with good care.

