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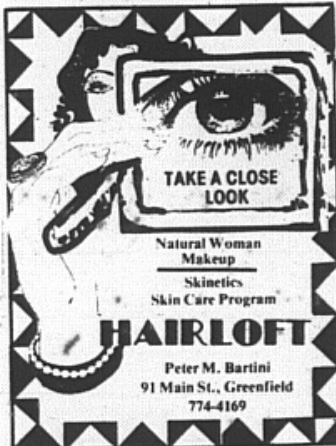
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gardening

VITAL SIGNS

Falling lower leaves, failure to revive after watering, smaller sized new leaves or roots growing out of the drain hole are sure signs that a plant needs repotting.

*By Pat Leuchtman
leisure Columnist*

In order to thrive a plant needs the proper light, water, food and air. It also needs to be able to wiggle its toes. A plant whose roots become crowded and pot-bound will soon show alarming symptoms. Its lower leaves may die and fall off, it may not revive after rewatering or its new leaves may be a definitely diminished size. It is even possible that the roots will begin to grow out of the pot's drainage hole, looking for more room and nourishment.

Before your plants show such serious signs of distress it's a good idea to check the roots to see whether it's time to repot. Put your fing-

ers across the top of your pot, holding the plant stem between two fingers. Then turn the pot upside down and give it a sharp rap on a table top. The roots and dirt will be knocked out of the pot all in a piece. If the soil is filled with densely matted white roots the plant is overdue for a potting. If, however, you find that the roots still have room to grow, no harm is done. Just tip the

and blocking the drainage hole. If the hole does get stopped up your soil will tend to get waterlogged. This prevents plants from getting the air they need and it will cause the roots of certain plants to rot.

After the pot is crocked and given a layer of compost, sprinkle in a little damp soil and prepare your plant. Knock it from its old pot, disentangle the roots from the crocking if necessary, and brush away some of the old soil from the roots.

Add enough soil so that when you settle the plant in its new pot it will not be planted any deeper than it was before. Don't forget to leave about an inch from the rim of the pot for watering.

Sprinkle the damp soil in the pot all around your plant. Every so often give the pot a shake and rap to help the new soil settle into place. Press the soil lightly as you finish and give the plant a good watering.

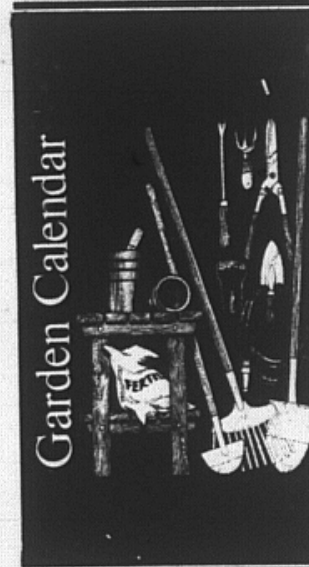
The following information is provided by the Franklin County Extension Service:

Now is the time to:

- Use dried material for Christmas decorations. Pick wild plant material that is already dried in fields.
- Make a dish garden or terrarium to give as a gift.
- Check growing conditions before you give a plant.
- Make a "want list" of your garden needs.
- Trim foundation evergreens for Christmas greens.
- Decorate a large houseplant such as Norfolk Island Pine for Christmas.

Note:

- The easiest way to keep a cut tree for Christmas is to buy it when it is fresh.



pot back over the root ball, give it a tap to settle it in place and the plant will never know the difference.

When you do decide to repot, begin with a clean pot that will give the plant about an extra inch of room all around. Do not use a much larger pot because the soil will tend to get compacted and waterlogged without the roots growing all through it. Also, the nutrients in the soil will have all leached away before the roots have a chance to reach them.

If you are using a clay pot, soak it for a couple of hours first so that it will not wick moisture away from the soil and the roots.

Next prepare the pot by covering the bottom with pebbles or broken flowerpot pieces. This process, called crocking, will help keep the drainage hole clear.

Put in a half inch thick layer of compost if you have it. This will give the plant more nutrition as the roots develop and it will also help to keep the fine soil from sifting down

Your plant will be able to spread out its roots comfortably and grow happily again.

Young plants may have to be potted two or three times a year while they are doing a lot of growing, but mature plants will only need to be repotted every year or two, usually in the spring just before it



starts its season of vigorous growth. Some plants, like the jade tree, will be happy in their pots for several years. Indeed, some plants like the geranium will not bloom until they are slightly potbound and spider plants won't send out babies unless their roots are crowded. But these are special cases. To do their best, most plants need room for their roots to develop just as they need room to spread their foliage.

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