



OVERVIEW

Reasons for choosing correct soil

- Moist springs → risk of waterlogging in pots
- Hot, dry summers → pots dry out quickly
- Clay-heavy local soils → too dense for containers

A reliable mix typically includes:

- Peat moss or coco coir — moisture retention
- Compost — nutrients and beneficial microbes
- Perlite or vermiculite — drainage and aeration

What NOT to use

Avoid:

- Garden soil — too heavy, compacts, contains pests and weed seeds
- Topsoil — poor drainage, suffocates roots

THE PLANTING

- Use larger pots in summer to reduce drying out. To aid water retention consider lining very large terracotta pots with thick black plastic.
- Refresh soil every 1–2 years by mixing in new potting mix and compost.
- Mulch the top of pots (straw, bark, or wool pellets) to keep moisture in.
- Water deeply but less often to encourage strong roots.

RIGHT POT FOR RIGHT PLANT

- Remember the root depth of the plant. Deep pots for tap rooted plant.
- If plant is clearly stressed, then soil is no longer good enough. Remove bottom 1/3rd of root ball, then refill with good compost and water well!
- Extra large pots with heavy/large plants in them where re-potting is an impossibility, refresh annually by taking off the top couple of inches of potting mix (without disturbing any surface roots) and replace with fresh compost. Feed and water well.

SOIL FOR CONTAINERS

- Choose a good quality “potting mix” or “potting soil”. Potting soils are formulated specifically for containers. They hold moisture and provide good drainage which is necessary for healthy root growth. If purchasing potting soil in bags, be sure to keep the bags sealed to keep the unused soil from drying out and becoming hydrophobic.

- Some potting soils contain fertilizer pre-mixed into the soil. Be sure to read the label and follow directions.
- Do not use “planting mix”, “garden soil”, or “top soil” as your primary soil component. These are too heavy or otherwise unsuited as a container medium.
- Some plants require soil with a specific composition or drainage ability. It is best to cater to the plants' needs.
- Do not put a layer of gravel or other material in the bottom of a pot 'to improve drainage'. It actually makes drainage worse. A broken piece of an old pot over the drainage hole is enough.
- As an added advantage to good draining Ian suggested this product, safe for plants, from most large DIY stores. See end of article page 3 for photo.

WATERING

Consistent, sufficient watering is important for containers because they can dry out quickly. Drip irrigation on a timer can be a good solution for containers.

- Watering requirements will vary according to the season, type of container, and sun exposure.
- Check containers daily. Stick your finger into the top inch of soil. If it feels damp, there is no immediate need for water. If it feels dry, water until some runs out the bottom of the container.
- Note: If a container dries out completely and the soil cannot absorb water it may run through the container without actually moistening the soil. You may need to *soak the entire pot* or leave a slow drip on it to rewet the soil.
- In mid-summer and on windy days watering may be needed daily. In the heat of summer, it may be helpful to place a saucer under the pot that can fill with excess water and then be reabsorbed as needed. In winter, remove the saucer so the plants don't sit in waterlogged soil.

PESTS

Watch out for grubs, if your plant suddenly wilts the pot could have a form of weevil grubs.

To control:

- Once the plant is safely out of the pot, brush the potting mix off the roots. Be sure any grub-infested potting mix is removed. Gather up the newspaper or plastic and dispose of it securely in a sealed container. Never place grub-infested potting mix where the pests can get into your garden.
- Scrub the pot thoroughly using a solution of nine parts water to one-part household bleach. The bleach will sterilize the container and kill any eggs that haven't yet hatched. Rinse the pot thoroughly to remove all traces of bleach, then allow it to air dry.
- Repot the plant in a container filled with fresh, good-quality potting mix. Place the plant in a shady, protected spot for a few days before moving it back to its permanent location.



