



Flowerpot Plants

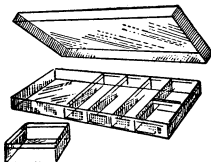
➤ **LITTLE INDOOR** gardens kept in flowerpots play a part in the home life of almost everyone. They may range all the way from the scores of thriving plants kept by active housewives to the single struggling rubber tree of a crowded city apartment. Everyone can have a few green leaves and maybe a flower or two around the house.

The conventional flowerpot has been found, through many generations of use, well suited for growing plants indoors. A few hints may be useful, however, to make sure of their proper management.

In the first place, the pot should be large enough for the plant that is to grow in it. It is to be remembered that most plants spread their roots at least as far as they spread their branches, and farther. Even a seemingly big pot, therefore, is close quarters for a plant, and the deficiency will have to be made up to the crowded roots by ample water and rich earth.

But not too much water, and neither too much nor too little earth. If you fill the pot too full, you will be washing part of it over the rim, or slopping water over, and in any case you will be encouraging a heap of dry dust to form above the level of the edge. If you put in too little, the natural settling of the soil will bind the roots down into the narrow end of the pot, in half the space they were intended to have.

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Also, of course, the less earth in the pot, the lower is the fertilizer supply available for the plant and the more likely one is to over-water and turn the soil into a mass of bricky mud. There is a happy medium: one finger-width (that excellent, flexible old unit of measurement) below the rim of the pot.

The time-honored way of keeping house plants in pots of garden soil is excellent—if you have good soil to start with. However, many of us who live in cities are handicapped by not having any good soil in our own backyards. Instead, we are all too likely to have sterile stuff that was thrown out when the basement was dug for our apartment house, perhaps mixed with building debris and later accumulations of cinders. Plants cannot thrive on that.

Even when they are started with good soil in their pots, house plants eventually use up the initial supply of the chemical elements they need for their life-activities. So to the soil in the pots, whether good or poor to start with, it is often necessary to add new supplies of these elements.

You can get from any well-stocked drug-store the few things needed, for the major mineral elements in plant nutrition are only seven: potassium, magnesium, calcium, phosphorus, sulfur, nitrogen and a little bit of iron. These are not supplied to the plant separately, but paired with each other in compounds: potassium phosphate, magnesium sulfate, calcium nitrate, with the iron also coming as a sulfate.

It is possible to get these compounds ready made up and weighed out in vials, to be dissolved in water for a balanced plant ration. When you get a set of the balanced-ration chemicals, all you need to do is dissolve them in water according to directions, and water your plants with that solution instead of ordinary tap water.

Science News Letter, March 27, 1954

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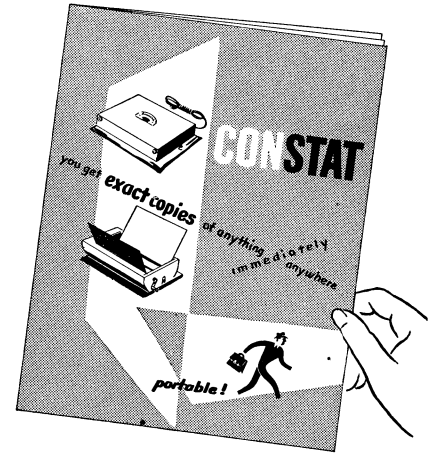
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