

Gardening Indoors

by Rita Pelczar

COLD WEATHER can't stop a gardener, but may require re-focusing efforts indoors. Houseplants, especially those that summered outdoors, often need extra attention now to deal with decreased humidity and lower light conditions. Here are a few products to help you keep your houseplants healthy and vigorous.

Repotting plants that have outgrown their container or just need fresh media is necessary from time to time, and good potting soil is critical to success. As I repotted some of my plants recently, I employed a few new products that I really like because they provide a good environment for healthy root growth, and they are made of recycled materials.

From Growstone® comes a line of American-made products designed to prevent overly soggy soil and the resulting problems. Made from recycled glass, "growstones" are lightweight, pH neutral, clean, and non-compacting. They come in different sizes for different purposes.

Growstone GS-2 is a soil aerator; it adds porosity to any compost- or coir-based mix. You can customize your potting soil for specific plants, adding more growstones for those that need more drainage, such as cactus and succulents. They provide more aeration than perlite, and they don't rise to the surface and wash out of the container when watered like perlite sometimes does.



Gnat Nix!

Gnat Nix!™, another Growstone product, significantly reduces a pest problem associated with soggy soils: fungus gnats.

A ½- to ¾-inch top dressing of this product provides good control of fungus gnats without chemicals. I discovered that care must be taken to water gently, alternatively you can water from the bottom, so an even layer remains intact; as long as the Gnat Nix covers the entire surface of the container, it provides a physical barrier that effectively disrupts the life cycle of the gnats. It can be used indoors or out. www.growstone.com.

Magic Dirt™ is a sustainable, environmentally friendly alternative to peat-based products. Developed by Cenergy USA, it is a potting mix composed of anaerobically digested dairy manure fibers and composted forest products. The patented two-stage digester used to process the manure cap-



Magic Dirt

tures methane gas that is used to generate renewable energy. It has excellent porosity, its texture is light and spongy, and it's available at independent garden centers and Wal-Mart stores. The company just announced that Magic Dirt received a Bioproduct Innovation of the Year award. www.magic-dirt.com.

As I moved some large plants from their outdoor summer homes back indoors this fall, I was pleased to have the help of the



PotLifter from Gardeners Edge

PotLifter, from Gardeners Edge. It's a very well constructed two-person tool that can support up to 200 pounds. The sturdy sling can cradle any pot from nine to 26 inches in diameter; nylon straps are attached to comfortable grips. It's also useful for moving large stones. It makes lifting without bending so much easier and less awkward—your back will thank you. www.gardenersedge.com.

Good saucers that don't leak prevent damage to furniture and floors. Lee Valley's **Steel Pot Saucers** do the job and look good at the same time. They are made of powder-coated galvanized



Lee Valley's Steel Pot Saucer



Down Under Plant Turner

steel with four nylon sliders on the underside that make sliding large plants, particularly over carpet, much easier. They come in two colors: charcoal or terra cotta; and three sizes: 10, 13, and 15 inches. www.leevalley.com.

Some container-grown plants respond well to regular turning; it keeps



Emily's Garden System

their growth from becoming lopsided. The **Down Under Plant Turner**, also from Gardeners Edge, makes it easy to rotate even large plants—it's a combination 12-inch plastic plant saucer and lazy Susan. It can be used indoors or outside to rotate plants weighing up to 250 pounds.

Nothing can beat a homegrown tomato, so I turned to a hydroponic system to grow my winter tomatoes in the south facing windows of my mudroom, supplemented with suspended plant lights. **Emily's Garden System** from HydroFarm is the perfect size for my set up. It is 16 inches wide and 24 inches long and has six good size planters. The kit comes complete with growing media, an air pump and tubing, seed starter cubes, nutrients, water level indicator, and a pH test kit. It was easy to set up and the motor is quiet. I started my tomatoes in pots and transplanted them into two of the hydroponic containers when they were about six inches tall. I seeded basil directly in the supplied planting cubes placed in the center of the remaining four containers. It's still too early to evaluate my harvest, but fresh Caprese salad is on my holiday menu. www.hydrofarm.com.

While for me, nothing quite equals working outside in my gardens but taking good care of my indoor plants keeps my hands in the dirt throughout winter.

Rita Pelczar is a contributing editor for The American Gardener.

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RIGHT: RITA PELCZAR

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