



Trowel Talk!

October 2018

Repotting a great outdoor activity for fall

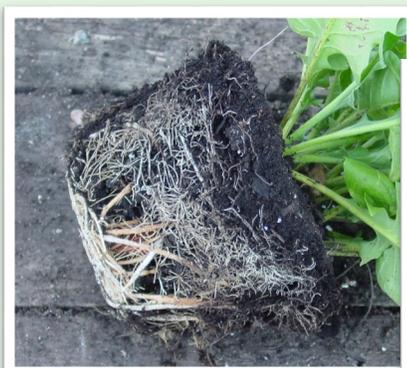
By now, houseplants that summered outdoors are back inside, safe from frosts. But if these or other plants need repotting, you can do it outside on a warm October day.

A slower rate of growth, smaller than usual new leaves and faster wilting all signal it is time to repot. Roots growing up from the surface or out of the drainage hole indicate the need for some root pruning and perhaps a larger pot. Increase pot diameter by at most 3-5cm - too large a volume of moist soil surrounding the root ball encourages root rot.

Remember though, plants should be repotted only when actively growing. And some plants like to be root-bound - check specific care instructions for each plant.

Use one of the nutrient-enriched soilless mixes made specifically for indoor containers - they are light, porous and insect and disease-free. I buy it by the bag but dump it into a lidded bucket, which is easier to carry and store.

You can tip the root ball of a small plant out into your hand - a sharp tap on the bottom or sides may be



Top: Just out of the pot.

Left: Roots ready for pruning
Photos: Kelly Noel



needed to dislodge it. If necessary, loosen it by running a knife around the inside edge. For larger plants, put the pot on its side and tip it until the root ball slides out. If soil falls away as you take it out of the pot, the roots probably do not need pruning.

Dampen the root ball and untangle and trim off roots that are wrapped around the sides and accumulated at the bottom. If you can't loosen them by hand, use a knife to cut down the sides in several locations. Never take off more than one third of the root ball. Gently tease away some of the old medium - a fork may help. If you spot any brown and mushy roots, cut them away and resolve to stop overwatering!

Wrap the root ball in a damp towel while you scrub the pot in a basin of soapy water. Rinse thoroughly using the garden hose.

Cover the pot's drainage hole with something porous, like a bit of cloth,

to keep mix from dribbling out. Do NOT put a layer of rocks in the bottom - this old habit decreases root space and slows drainage, creating a damp zone where roots can rot. Put in some fresh mix, sit the root ball on it: for most plants you must make sure the surface will not be deeper than before. Work more mix in all around - don't pack it but make sure there are no air pockets. Water, let it drain, and add more as it settles.

Finally, if you pruned the roots, you must prune off some foliage to compensate for the root loss.

Plants will be in some shock immediately following this process but should soon rally and show signs of rejuvenation.

Repotting outdoors will be a refreshing exercise for you too. And you can clean up by hosing down the work area - something you can't do indoors!

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Kelly Noel
Master Gardener

October To Do

- Put stakes in around plants that will be wrapped after freeze-up.
- Drain and invert rain barrels, empty unheated birdbaths.
- Store garden ornaments, and empty and store pots that could be damaged by frost and cold.
- Water newly planted trees and shrubs until freeze-up, and make sure evergreens have adequate water to help guard against winter desiccation.
- Plant (or at least heel in) any remaining potted perennials.
- Bring in tender plants if you haven't already.
- Plant spring bulbs before the ground freezes.
- Ask an MG if you have any gardening or plant ID questions

Tip of the Month

When deciding when/whether to prune or cut back a hydrangea for the winter, you need to know the type of hydrangea involved, and whether it blooms on old wood or new wood. If you have one that blooms on old wood, and you cut it back before blooming, you will lose flowers. (This is true of other shrubs, so for unknown shrubs, in general it's safe to prune after the year's flowering.)

Hydrangea arborescens: The best known of these is probably 'Annabelle'. These are the hydrangeas with big white balls of bloom, and large, thin leaves on long stems, that one sees frequently in gardens. They bloom on new wood. You can cut the current year's growth back hard (leave 2-3 buds on each shoot) in late fall or early spring. Some like to leave the large dried heads until spring for winter interest; however, this makes a messier cleanup in spring.

Hydrangea paniculata: Often called Pee-Gee (for *paniculata grandiflora*). These usually have large conical blooms, in white aging to strawberry pink. These also flower on new wood, so can be treated like *H. arborescens*.

Hydrangea macrophylla: Bignea or florist's hydrangea. These often have flowers in cool pinks and blues, round ball clusters or flat 'lacecap' forms, and thick, often glossy, dark leaves. They

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton



Where to find us for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034—Wednesday and Thursday 1–3 pm (all year)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca - monitored daily

Send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID.

CLINICS:

Closed for the season, resume in 2019.

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Monday, October 15th – 7:00 pm

Kitchen Vegetable Gardens Through the Ages

Judith Cox, Master Gardener

Russell Meadows Retirement Community, 475 Church Street, Russell

Hosted by Russell Horticultural Society

Friend of the Farm Lecture Series

Building 72 just east of the Prince of Wales roundabout. Free parking

\$12 members and \$15 non-members, per lecture

Tuesday, October 16th -7:00 pm to 9:00 pm

Bulbs for Year Round Enjoyment

Mary Reid, Master Gardener

Tuesday: November 6th - 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm

History of English Country House Gardens

Heather Clemenson, Master Gardener

Tuesday, November 6th -7:30 pm

Purple Carrots, Honey Bees and Magic

Judith Cox, Master Gardener

Old town hall, 821 March Road, Kanata

Kanata March Horticultural Society – guests \$5



For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.ca>



H. arborescens



H. paniculata

Photos: Amanda Carrigan



H. macrophylla

bloom on old wood, so pruning is done after flowering in the summer, just to deadhead, shape and thin if needed, rather than cutting back completely. In Ottawa, it can be a nice green shrub, but often the flower buds don't survive our winters. The newer 'Endless Summer' cultivars are hardier, and bloom on both old and new wood.

Hydrangea anomala petiolaris: Climbing

hydrangea. These generally need pruning only to keep them within bounds. Prune after flowering if possible.

Hydrangea quercifolia: Oakleaf hydrangea. Blooms on old wood, so treat it like *H. macrophylla*.

Amanda Carrigan
Master Gardener