

Growing Houseplants – part 3

This is Steve Rulison bringing you information on Shore friendly living and gardening from the Eastern Shore Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension. From my perch near the mouth of Occohannock Creek, I recorded _____ of rain last week.

This week's Master Gardener Minute is a continuation of our Growing Houseplants Series.

Indoor plants growth is affected by light, temperature, humidity, water, nutrition, and soil. Today we will talk about nutrition and soil specifications for houseplants.

Many indoor gardeners have the same problem with fertilizer that they have with water — they want to give their plants too much. Danger from over-fertilization occurs because any fertilizer used, whether in liquid, powder, or tablet form, will dissolve in soil water and will form salts in the water. When you over-fertilize, the water in the soil becomes so salty that it “burns” the plant's roots by removing water from them. Excess soluble salts accumulate as a whitish crust on the surface of the growing medium and/or near the rim of the container.

The secret to fertilizing plants indoors is to apply small amounts of fertilizer as the plant grows. Without new growth, the plant has a limited need for more fertilizer. During the winter when light levels are low, a plant's need for fertilizer reduces. During the summer when light levels increase and the plant is actively growing, its need for fertilizer increases. If the overall plant color becomes lighter green, fertilize every two weeks. If the new growth is dark green but the leaves are small and internodes seem longer than on the older growth, decrease the fertilizer rate.

A plant's soil/growing medium provides anchorage, water, and minerals. When repotting plants, make sure that the new mix is well drained and aerated, holds water and nutrients well, and is within the right pH range (5.0-6.5). A good potting mix provides ample amounts of oxygen to the root system. Most professional mixes are good to use. Some plants require special mixes, e.g., bromeliads, orchids, and African violets. Either purchase these mixes or prepare your own.

This concludes our series on indoor plants.

The Master Gardeners are hosting a Cape Charles Garden Tour on Sunday, June 6, 2021, from 12:00 pm - 5:00 pm. The Tour begins at New Roots Youth Garden, on the corner of Randolph Ave and Fig Street, where children, families and the community experience a connection with food from seed to table. Gardeners will be available to answer your questions about their plant choices, horticultural practices and how they deal with gardening challenges. Come out and enjoy a day in the garden!

For answers to Gardening questions and more, call your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office. Here on the Shore call either 678-7946 or 787-1361.

<https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=B1318&title=Growing%20Indoor%20Plants%20with%20Success>