

Now that the weather has turned from rainy and cold to warm and the sun shining, I think everyone is itching to get out of their house and do something outside. But after you get everything planted outside, if it isn't already, don't forget about the plants that are inside. House plants need a little extra love once in a while to keep them happy and healthy.

The first thing to decide is whether or not the plant needs to be repotted and bumped up to a larger pot size. If the plant tips over easily or is top heavy, I would repot it into the next size up of pot. If there are roots coming out the bottom of the pot or there are many visible roots on the top, it may be time to repot, but it depends on the type of plant. Orchids, for example, usually have roots visible and for that species of plant, that's okay. If the plant is suddenly flagging and no other factors have changed, consider pulling it out of the pot to look at the roots. When the roots are circling around the pot, it should be repotted in a bigger pot. If the roots aren't circling, replacing the soil should also be a consideration. The plant may have used up most of the available nutrients in the soil, which would cause the health to decline. If there is a crust forming in the pot, the soil is discolored, or is pulling away from the edge of the pot, the plant could need new soil. However, if the plant itself is not too big for the pot, and the roots are not circling, you should consider cleaning the soil off the plant and its roots and repotting it in new potting soil, which you can then replace in the same pot.

It is always good to reevaluate the environment that the house plant is in to make sure that it is happy and healthy. Is the plant tilting toward the light source? This could be a sign that it is not receiving enough light, because the cells on the side opposite the light will elongate more than those on the side with the light. As long as the plant isn't stretching too much, it's not something to be concerned about. I recommend giving a tilting plant a quarter turn every time that you water, as this will cause the cells to elongate more evenly. This will help prevent the plant from getting too heavy on one side and tipping over.

Another important part of the plant's environment is water. If hard water is used, consider allowing it to sit for two or three days before giving to the plant so that the chlorine and fluoride can evaporate. While these elements aren't harmful to the plant, if they build up in the plant or soil, it can cause toxicity issues. Water from water softeners should not be used on plants.

If the plant has any dead leaves or branches, they should be removed, because they can be used as food or shelter by some household plant pests. Sometimes house plants will get fungi in the soil, either from the air or from soil that wasn't sterile. If this happens, remove the plant from the pot, gently remove the soil from the plant roots, and rinse the plant roots with lukewarm water to remove residual soil. Discard the soil, and depending on the severity of the fungus, clean the pot in a bleach solution, or repot it in a new pot.

This is far from everything about house plant care, but hopefully it is enough to get you started and in the right direction.

For more information on house plants, contact Miranda Earnest at the Buffalo County Extension Office, 308-236-1235 or [mearnest2@unl.edu](mailto:mearnest2@unl.edu).