

# Rescue Your Houseplants From Hostile Conditions

NEWARK, Del. — Houseplants must endure a hostile indoor world replete with mealybugs and mites, root rot and soggy soil and death by drought or overfeeding.

If your plants are in trouble, Bob Mulrooney, University of Delaware extension plant pathologist, has some suggestions on how to identify the malady.

"First, know the name of the plant," he says. "This helps you look up the proper care of the plant in a book or identify it to a knowledgeable expert."

Mulrooney says plant fanciers should also look for certain telltale signs of the problem. Insects, for example, usually leave clues.

"Cottony bits indicate mealybugs, whereas sticky sap and brown bumps could be scale insects," he says. "If the leaves look greyish, you might search for spider mites. Leaves that are gnarled or stunted at the growing point might mean cyclamen mites."

If leaves are dropping all over the plant, Mulrooney says this may be a sign that the plant was chilled, or just recently moved. Over-watered plants usually have leaves

yellowing and dropping first from the bottom of the plant.

Sometimes the same symptom can arise from different causes, he cautions. A wilting plant can mean overwatering, underwatering or overfertilization. Brown spots on leaves could indicate disease, improper watering, overfertilization or sunburn. Leaves with brown edges could mean severe underwatering or periodic episodes of severe drying out.

Mulrooney also has some hints on how to keep your houseplants healthy.

- Do not overpot. "As a general rule, the new pot should never be more than one to two inches wider than the root ball," he says. "Extra soil around the roots will hold too much water and encourage root rot."

- Try to use unglazed clay pots. Mulrooney says clay pots allow water to evaporate from the sides as well as from the soil surface. Roots can also get oxygen by growing close to the sides of a clay pot. Soil in decorative glazed pots may appear dry on the top even though the bottom is soggy with too much water. Soggy soil kills roots,

the specialist reminds us.

- Give the plant the right amount of light. "Here again you have to know something about the light your plant needs," Mulrooney says. "Low-light plants should be placed in north or east windows and high-light plants in south or west windows."

- Watch out for plant problems associated with windows. Leaves that contact cold glass can become damaged and turn black. Heat registers and radiators are often

located near windows, causing excessively dry conditions.

- Water properly and thoroughly so that some water drains out the bottom of the pot. "Usually plants in pots four inches or larger will not need water for one, two or even three weeks," Mulrooney says. "However, room temperature and light levels will also affect frequency of watering."

- As a general rule, houseplants do not need fertilizer during the

winter months.

- Don't mist houseplants. "Misting is a useless exercise because it only increases humidity for a few minutes and can spread fungal and bacterial disease," Mulrooney says. The specialist suggests a more effective way of raising the humidity around plants. "Group plants together," he says. "Or place the potted plants on a shallow tray of pebbles which is filled with water."

## Commonsense Lifestyle Can Mean A Longer Life

NEWARK, Del. — For many Americans living longer may be merely a matter of sticking to a commonsense life-style.

"Most of us are born healthy and made sick as a result of personal behavior and environmental conditions," says Roxane Whittaker, University of Delaware extension home economist. "Many of our current health problems are caused by our life-style—basically, the failure to exercise enough, eat properly and take care of ourselves intelligently."

Lightening up your diet with the

right foods and eating sparingly are two basic habits that can tip the scale of good health in your favor.

"Snack on fresh fruits and vegetables, and reduce the fat, salt and cholesterol in your diet," Whittaker says. "This also means choosing lean meats, fish, chicken and skim milk instead of more fatty foods."

Overeating can be an automatic response to anger, stress or boredom. The agent suggests taking steps to avoid these situations or reacting to them in a more positive way through exercise or modified behavior.

Exercise should be part of a regular routine. Take time for

brisk walks, swimming, jumping rope, bicycling or calisthenics.

"Cut down or cut out smoking and drinking," Whittaker says. "Evidence strongly suggests that these will do you in more quickly than anything except hard drugs and poison."

Whittaker says a number of studies support the view that Americans can improve their health by establishing commonsense habits. She cites a University of Wisconsin study of more than 2,000 people who lived longer than average lives.

"The study concludes that years can be added to your life by eating and drinking frugally, but with enjoyment.

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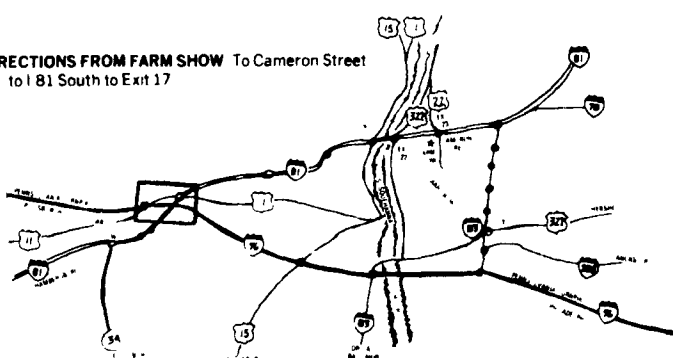
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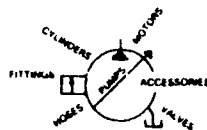
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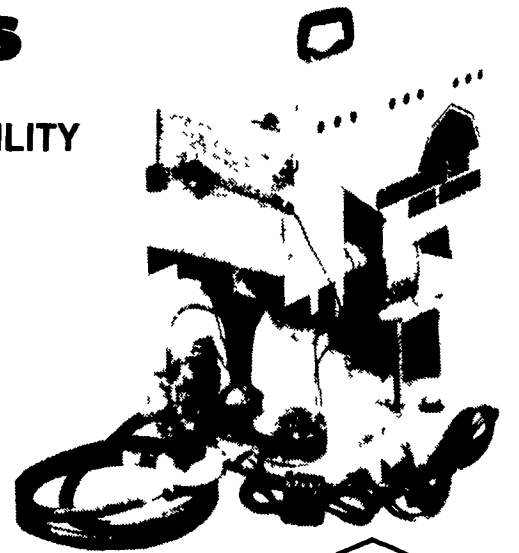
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