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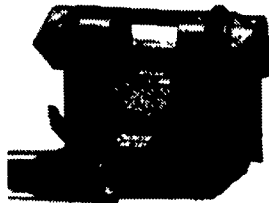
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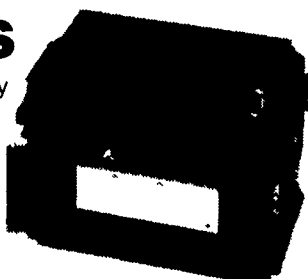
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**Perk Up Peaked Plants
Affected By Poor Indoor Care**

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Do those robust, leafy plants you brought in last fall now look as drained and droopy as an accountant after tax season? Chances are you need to adjust your indoor plant care, says a gardening specialist in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

Robert Nuss, professor of ornamental horticulture, said that indoor plant problems often have recognizable symptoms that can be alleviated easily and inexpensively.

Root rot. Nuss rates root rot as the most common problem for indoor plants. "Overwatering is the main cause," Nuss says. "Avoid using heavy soils that drain slowly and use containers with a drain hole in the bottom."

Nuss suggests using light potting soils or vermiculite to allow for proper drainage.

Nutrient deficiencies. If indoor plant foliage appears to be pale green or light green, the plant has not received enough nitrogen. "Applying fertilizer every month to two months should make up for any nutrient deficiency," Nuss says.

Spotting a potash (or phosphorus) deficiency is more difficult. Occasionally, leaf edges may turn brown and die.

Wilted or drying leaves. In winter, humidity levels drop, a condition that turns indoor environments hot and dry as homeowners seal windows and crank up heating systems. Dried stems and leaves are a sure sign of too-dry air.

Group plants together or place them in trays filled with

pebbles and water. Keep the water level just below the surface of the pebbles, preventing root saturation.

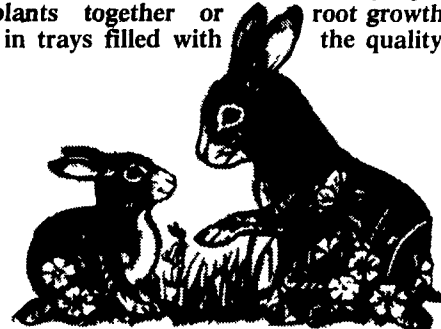
Spindly growth or off-color foliage. Light yellow foliage or thin winter growth may be caused by a lack of light. The solution is simple — place plants near a bright window. Adding additional light near the plant will help as well.

White, or yellowish crust on soil surface. Unabsorbed mineral salts from fertilizer or hard water can accumulate on the soil surface or plant stems. These salts, toxic to roots and plant stems, can be eliminated by leaching. Nuss says soil is leached when about 10 percent of the applied water passes through the drain holes in a plant container. Excess water that drains through the container should be thrown out.

Plant soil should be leached once a month throughout the year.

Pot-bound plants. Stunted or low-quality foliage can be caused by too many roots. Nuss recommends removing the plant from the pot to inspect root growth. If there is a large number of roots circling the potting soil, the plant must be repotted. Tightly matted roots can be loosened by cutting the circling pattern that has formed in the old pot.

Make four to six vertical cuts into the roots from the top to the bottom of the root mass. The new pot should be several inches wider and deeper than the old one. Don't move the plant into a very large pot, either. Excess root growth still will reduce the quality of foliage.



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