

## **Care of New and Returning Plants:**

### **Leaves and Cuttings:**

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Source: Depending on the source of your new plant the procedure will vary. At a store or plant show/sale you can examine the plant before purchase. Mail order plants of course are another story. Where you can examine the plant before purchase make a thorough examination, and don't buy a problem plant. Examining a plant in the salesroom can be difficult. Hotels often try to save money on electricity making an examination difficult.

Things to look for: insects, thrips, mites and other critters. Good light is essential in making a thorough examination. A flashlight can make the job much easier. A hand-held magnifier (five to 10 power) is also helpful. Fungus is not usually a problem, but mildew can be. Mildew appears as a powdery greyish white substance on leaves and buds. Viral and bacterial diseases may appear as spots, circles or streaks on leaves, twisted stems or disfigured leaves, or general unthriftiness. Avoid such plants.

### **Treatment of new plants:**

In general it is a good idea to allow recent acquisition an opportunity to become acclimated to their new home before repotting. After they seem to have recovered consider repotting into the soil mixture you are accustomed to using. It may be necessary to remove much of the old soil if it is much heavier or lighter than the soil you are used to using. If it the plant appears pot bound put it into a size larger pot, but remember some plants prefer to be somewhat under potted.

### **Quarantine:**

New plants should remain in quarantine for four to six weeks as a minimum. Placing the new plants in a separate building would be ideal, but usually the best we can do is a different room. Terrariums can be a good solution when there are only a few new plants and they must be kept in the plant room. For this purpose the terrarium should be closed. A plastic sweater or shoe box works well. Bottles, Jars and Bags also make good terrariums. Placing a new plant in a plastic bag can isolate it on the plant stand. Remember to support the bag with a drinking straw or stake. Plants in quarantine should be inspected frequently.

### **Preventive Treatment:**

Even if the plants pass inspection you may wish to

take preventive measures to keep your new plants healthy. Some systemic Insecticides including Marathon and Neem Oil have relatively low toxicity for mammals. Contact Insecticide-Insecticidal Soap and other contact sprays are faster acting than systemics, but may be less reliable as the insecticide must contact every insect. Insecticidal Soap has the advantage of extremely low toxicity.

### **Remedial Treatment:**

If critters are found there is a range of actions you can take. The most drastic, but a very effective one, is to discard the plant. However, you may still be able to put down leaves or cuttings from the plant. To do this safely dip the leaves or cuttings in a 10% chlorine bleach solution for a few seconds, then rinses in clear water. Place the plant material on paper towels and allow to dry. You may wish to treat the affected plant with insecticide to remove the infestation. Both the systemic and contact insecticides mentioned earlier or a combination of both can be successful. Alcohol applied on cotton swabs is an effective treatment for mealy bugs. If you do choose to treat the plant be sure to maintain an even more vigilant quarantine.

### **Returning Show and Sale Plants:**

Plants returning from a sale or show should be closely examined before returning them to the collection. Such plants should be quarantined as with purchased plants. Pretreatment with a systemic insecticide before taking plants to a show or sale is a useful practice, but does not replace either post examination or quarantine.