How to take care of your potted plant

Your plant needs water, food, warmth, air and light to survive and thrive. While in a pot your plant is completely dependent on you to ensure its needs are met. Below are some basic tips for caring for your plant until you decide to plant it out in the garden or transplant it into a bigger container.

Positioning your plant

Find a place for your plant that is light but not in direct sun. A position where you can see your plant and remember to water it is preferable, either inside on a windowsill or outside by a tap. Choose a position where temperatures will not fluctuate greatly.

A greenhouse is ideal for cuttings, as they require constant humidity. It is easy to turn a soft drink bottle into a mini greenhouse by cutting off the bottom and using the top to create a greenhouse, the humidity will help the plant to establish roots quickly.

It is important to have enough light for the type of plant as some plants like full sun and some prefer partial shade. If you notice that your plant is leaning towards the light it may need repositioning to a sunnier spot, too much sun may cause the plant to burn.

Germination times will vary for seeds.

Watering your plant

Most plants need water or they will die. But more plants are killed by over-watering than by lack of water! The most important thing to remember is that the soil needs to be kept moist while the plant establishes roots or in the case of a seed while the seed is germinating. How much water it needs will depend on the time of year, the type of plant, and the environment that the plant is being kept in.

How to check whether a plant needs watering:
Place your little finger into the soil, if the soil is moist there is no need to water. If the soil feels dry water the plant from the top and drain any excess water from the saucer after an hour.

As a general guide:
- Plants will need watering daily during the spring and summer months and less often during autumn and winter.
- Some plants like succulents require less watering than others.
- Plants in smaller pots will need watering more frequently than those in larger pots.
- If the plant wilts it needs to be watered.
Providing Food for Your Plant

The potting mix provided will have adequate food for your plant while the plant is establishing roots. The addition of fertilisers may burn roots so it is best just to water for the first couple of months. Once roots are established the most effective way of feeding them is to add liquid fertiliser to the water when watering. Worm tea is a great way to provide the plant with nutrients. Plants will need feeding during the *growing and flowering season*, for most plants this is in September to May.

Planting in the Garden

When your plant has established roots and outgrown its pot it is time to re-pot or plant in the garden.

Cuttings need to be **hardened off**, gradually introduced into a new environment, after the root system has developed. It is best to wait a few seasons before planting into the garden.

The best time to plant out in the garden is from autumn or spring.

Water the plant well.

Dig a hole in the garden slightly bigger than the pot. Select a location that best meets the plant's needs in terms of sunlight hours, size of plant at maturity and how it is likely to grow.

Carefully loosen the soil by squeezing the pot until the plant can be removed without pulling the plant. Gently tickle the roots especially if they have started to grow around the inside of the pot. If pot-bound the roots may need a gentle trim.

Fill the hole with water before placing the plant in the hole. Make sure all the roots are underground and that the stem is at ground level, as the soil needs to be at the same level as it was in the pot. Water the plant well.

Re-potting your Plant

To re-pot, choose a larger pot (usually one or two sizes up), half fill with a good quality potting mix, carefully remove plant and reposition in new pot. Make sure all the roots are well covered with potting mix and that the stem is at soil level. Water the plant well.

Enjoy watching your plant grow.
Caring for your potted plant

Remember your plant needs **water, food, warmth, air and light** to survive and thrive!

Place your plant in a sunny position but not in full sun or create a mini greenhouse to keep cuttings nice and warm.

Water your plant so the soil is kept moist but remember to check the soil first.

Feed your plant once roots are well established with homemade worm diluted with water (10:1).

Transplant your plant to a bigger pot or plant in the garden in autumn/spring. Your plant will still need to be cared for, especially over summer!

The secret to a happy plant is love and attention!
Plant Activities for the Classroom

Plants need **water**, **food**, **warmth**, **air** and **light** to survive and thrive!

**Sprouting Seeds**

*Water:* Bring in as many seeds that can be found at home in the pantry. Lay the seeds on cotton wool in recycled plastic containers to watch germination up close. Draw and record the changes over a week. Edible seeds can be placed in glass jars and covered with old stockings so that they can be rinsed twice a day and then tasted at the end of the week.

**Building a worm farm**

*Food:* Create a classroom worm farm out of old polystyrene boxes or purchase one from a hardware store or through your local council if they sell them. Collect food scraps from the lunch boxes to feed the worms. Remember that worms, like people, have foods that they don't like (do some research to find out their preferences). Collect the worm tea to feed the plants remembering to dilute 10:1!

**Making a greenhouse**

*Warmth:* Collect a number of plastic drink bottles and convert them into miniature greenhouses by carefully cutting off the bases with a Stanley knife. Take a sample of plant cuttings from the schoolyard or from home to propagate a range of plants to see which ones grow well in the classroom.

**Learning about air plants**

*Air:* Find out about what makes air plants so special: where do they grow, what are their needs and how would you identify one? If possible, bring one into the classroom to observe and take care of for a term. Create posters or booklets about air plants and display these around the room.

**Photosynthesis**

*Light:* Plants are the only living things that can covert sunlight into energy. Place identical seedlings in a range of light conditions (low, medium and high) and observe their rate of growth over time. Compare this to plants that have the same light conditions but are grown in a green house as well. Children can report on their findings to the class.