



August 16, 2022

Contributed by Susie Middleton

HOW to IDENTIFY and FIX a ROOT BOUND PLANT

This is the time of year Garden Centers are marking down Annual Plants to make room for fall varieties. Many times, these plants have been growing in the same container for a long time and have become root bound. That means the roots have outgrown the size of the pot and become tightly compacted – frequently growing out of the drain holes or in a circular pattern around the inside of the pot. They are so dense that they can no longer effectively absorb nutrients and water. This can inhibit future growth.



Figure 1 Photo Source: <https://flourishingplants.com/plants-that-like-to-be-root-bound/>

But a bargain is a bargain, so go ahead and purchase the plant but take the following steps before putting it in the ground or another container.

Remove the plant from the Pot If the pot is made of a flexible material, you can squeeze the pot in different directions to loosen the root bound plant. If the container is not flexible, you can use a long thin serrated knife or some other long thin sturdy object to cut around the plant. If the roots have grown out of the drain holes, you'll need to rip them off. Don't worry the plant will survive this.

Tease the Roots apart with the tines of a fork. If they are truly compacted this won't work – go to step 3.

Trim the bottom roots and slice the sides. Cut off the bottom third of the plant and then make three cuts on the sides slicing through the roots. The cut roots form new root tips that will grow in various directions.

Give your plant a booster drink before planting. Mix plant food with water – make it ½ the recommended strength (that means add twice as much water). Place your plant in this for a few minutes before planting.

This same technique works for house plants. However, when repotting you want to select a pot at least 1 inch larger in depth and width.

The following houseplants actually like being root bound: Peace Lily, Spider Plant, African Violets, Aloe, Umbrella Tree, Ficus, Agapanthus, Asparagus Fern, Spider Lily, Christmas Cactus, Jade Plant, Snake Plant, Boston Fern. The reasons some houseplants perform better as root bound houseplants are varied.

To learn more about these plants go to <https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/houseplants/hpgen/should-you-repot-your-plant-happy-root-bound-house-plants.htm>