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Portfolio Piece
The HOTH

Struggling with water-logged plants? While different plants have different needs, taking care of them shouldn't be a stressful experience.

The secret to keeping your plants healthy and happy might be as easy as adding some texture to reduce soil drainage.

If you're wondering what's the best soil for succulents or whether you should add perlite vs pumice, you're in the right place! We've got you covered with everything you wanted to know about soil drainage in potted plants!

Why Do Potted Plants Need Drainage?

Soil drainage is one of the most important parts of plant care, as it's the natural process of gravity moving water through the soil. Since both water and air are required for healthy root growth, finding a balance is key.

Thanks to gravity, water travels pretty easily through the top part of the soil. As it moves closer to the bottom, it slows down. This is because potting media is a highly absorbent and nutrient-dense mixture.

It retains water through a beautiful science of cohesion and adhesion.

Essentially, when water flows through containers, it sticks to itself and other surfaces. This process, known as capillary action, wicks water upwards against the gravitational energy.

At the very bottom of your plant's container, you will find the saturation zone. This is commonly referred to as the perched water table (PWT).

The perched water table always occurs in container gardening, and its size will vary depending on the soil mixture and depth of the container.

Root Rot

Root rot is what happens when your roots are constantly submerged in stagnant water from poor drainage. That prolonged exposure makes them susceptible to harmful fungi which turns the roots brown and mushy.

If left unchecked, root rot will eventually kill your plant.

That's why finding the right container and soil mixture for your plant is key to proper soil drainage.

How to Improve Soil Drainage in Potted Plants

Luckily, there are a couple of different ways to improve soil drainage. The secret is to add coarse materials that create texture and add air spaces in the potting medium.

Changing the composition allows for a higher or lower perched water table and can help increase drainage without losing a lot of soil.

If you don't want to worry about changing the potting medium, you can always change the pot. There are two different options: porous and non-porous.

- Porous: Clay pots evaporate water faster which makes them a great choice for succulents or Pilea's.
- Non-Porous: Plastic pots are better for plants that like to retain moisture, such as Birds of Paradise, Monstera, or Peace Lilies.

Size and material are important factors to take into consideration, and you should always check to see what your plant's unique needs are.

Put Your Nursery Pots in Large Planter Pots

Double potting, the act of using a plastic plant liner inside a larger pot, is a great way to add to your plant care. This technique has a lot of benefits, especially for nursery plants. When you start your nursery pots, it's important to be able to maneuver them without disrupting the root system.

You can also monitor whether or not stagnant water is gathering in the larger pot and make modifications as you go.

Use Drip Trays

Using drip trays is another great way to increase drainage for your indoor plants. They are easy additions to container gardens to help regulate water and soil drainage.

Excessive water is drained from the pot and evaporated in the trays. This not only helps to avoid root rot, but it can also save your floors.

Rocks In Soil for Drainage

Since water adheres to your potting soil, you'll need to add additional texture to increase drainage. By mixing in other elements, like lava rock or pebbles, there will be less wicking upward and faster drainage due to aeration.

This creates a lower perched water table, so your roots aren't water-logged.

Now, while it may seem like adding larger rocks to the bottom of a pot will create a similar effect, that's not necessarily true. This will only move your saturation zone up higher and potentially suffocate your roots.

Therefore, the best opportunity you have to improve drainage in potted plants is by modifying your potting medium with a mixture of small and large particles.

Perlite vs Pumice

While there are a few different options to add texture to your soil, perlite and pumice are two of the best. Learn more about what makes each one special, below!

Perlite:

- lightweight volcanic glass
- Aerates planting media
- Small, sterile
- Distinct white color
- Highly porous material
- Great for drainage
- Floats to the top when watering
- Dust can be harmful if ingested

Pumice:

- An also extremely porous volcanic rock
- Great for drainage
- A better choice for sandy soils
- Off-white color
- Larger particles than perlite
- Not sterile like Perlite
- Won't float to the top after watering

While both can help increase drainage, they have different benefits, depending on the soil you're using.

The Best Soil for Succulents

Since succulents share many properties with cacti, they need a different potting media than other moisture-loving plants. Thankfully, you can buy cactus and succulent potting mix that has sand and pumice.

Unlike other plants that need more nutrient-dense soil, succulent's specialty soil allows water to drain properly without over-saturating your roots. This means you could actually add rocks to the bottom of your planter without compromising your succulent's root system.

Upgrade Your Container Garden, Today!

Tired of dealing with water-logged roots? It's time to add better soil drainage in potted plants with these key changes.

Whether you are looking for the best soil for succulents, or even trying to decide what's better to use between perlite vs pumice, we have you covered.

Establishing with a knowledgeable retailer is a great way to ensure all your plant care questions and concerns are answered. From seasoned plant owners to first-time buyers, we will help you every step of the way!

Come visit us at either of our Bay Area locations or try our stress-free online ordering.

We are more than happy to ship your carefully packaged plants to you.