

## RECYCLING CLAY AND PLASTIC POTS

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Pots, pots; where are all the pots? That's what many florists in Connecticut are asking. The shortage of plastic pots has everyone looking for clay pots which in turn is causing them to be in short supply. This being the case, old and used pots may be pressed into service. Many of these may have been stored under benches, in headhouses, out-of-doors, or collected from customers.

These dirty pots should be treated before being recycled back into use. However, before treating, they should be cleaned thoroughly. It would be wise to soak and scrub them to get rid of all soil or vermiculite particles attached to the pots.

Pot treatment studies have been conducted by Walton (3), Nichols and Jodon (2) and McCain (1). While all did not include steaming as a treatment, they probably would agree that is the best treatment for clay pots. Steaming at 180°F. for 30 minutes will destroy all pathogens. Steam should not be used on plastic as it could melt, warp or destroy them. Since not all florists have steam, we are fortunate to have other materials that can be used.

Formaldehyde is the best of the chemical treatments. Diluted 1:40, clay and plastic pots can be disinfested with a 10 minute soak. However, formal-

dehyde has an offensive odor, is irritating to the hands, phytotoxic to plants and may be toxic to the workers.

Other chemical treatments included Clorox and LF-10. Results of these materials have been variable. The use of one of them, however, is better than no treatment at all. It would be best to identify the disease problems before treating. For example, pots used for poinsettias may be contaminated with Pythium or Thielaviopsis. Old geranium pots may have Xanthomonas or Thielaviopsis.

Washed and cleaned pots can be soaked in LF-10, diluted 1:50, for 10 minutes.

Clorox, while less effective than LF-10, can be used diluted 1:9 for a 30 minute soak. Since soil inactivates Clorox rapidly, reconstitute or change the solution frequently.

Cleaned plastic pots and containers can be treated with hot water. A 3 minute dip at 160°F. is suggested.

In summary: When using a chemical,

1. Wash all soil debris from pots.
2. Wear gloves when using chemicals as they may cause skin irritations.
3. Be sure pots are completely immersed.
4. Keep solutions fresh.
5. Store treated pots in a clean area.

## References

1. McCain, A. H. 1973. Hot water treatment for plastic pots. Flower and Nursery Report 7/73:10
2. Nichols, L. P. and M. H. Jodon. 1972. Chemical soaks for prevention of growth of pathogenic organisms on clay and plastic pots. Penn. Flower Growers Bulletin 250. April.
3. Walton, G. S. 1966. Treatment of flower pots before re-use. Conn. Florist Newsletter. July, pg. 1-3.