**Indoor Plant Culture, Part 3**

**Segment for Week of Dec 20, 2021**

This is Julie Callahan bringing you information on shore friendly living and gardening from the Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension. This is the third in the 3-part series on indoor plants. This week I will talk about the grooming and care of your houseplants.

Grooming involves the removal of all spent flowers, dying leaves, and dead branches. Keep leaves dust-free by washing with warm water and mild soap. Neatly trim off the brown tips of leaves with sharp scissors. Increase humidity by placing plants on pebble-lined trays filled with water to within one half inch of the base of the pot.

There are several methods to maintain the plant’s health and appearance. To keep it compact and full, remove one inch or less of the stem tip and leaf growth, just above a node. This will stimulate new growth below the tip and encourage lateral branching. Plant material other than terminal shoot tips can be removed through pruning, including the removal of an entire branch to improve appearance. To obtain larger blooms from a few choice buds, remove some of the buds before they bloom. To attractively display vines such as ivies and philodendron, train them to climb a trellis.

When the soil feels somewhat dry apply enough water to thoroughly saturate the potting soil, allowing it to drain from the bottom of the pot. In some cases, such as a root-bound plant, water will drain from a container before the potting soil is saturated. In this case, fill a saucer with water and allow it to be absorbed into the container, making sure to remove the unabsorbed water in the saucer.

An indoor plant’s need for fertilizer is related to its growth rate. A plant that produces a lot of leaves and stems will need more fertilizer than a slower-growing plant. There are two main methods of fertilizing: water soluble and slow release. Apply both at the recommended rate and frequency. For slow-growing plants, reduce the recommended amount and frequency by about one-half. An advantage to slow release fertilizer is the reduced frequency with some lasting as long as 9 months.

Some potting soils contain slow-release fertilizers, which satisfies a plant’s nutritional requirements for several months, however, most supply few trace elements such as iron and manganese. It is important to use a fertilizer that contains these elements. Fertilizers are salts and when they become concentrated in a potting soil, can be toxic to roots. So, regardless of your fertilization method, thorough irrigation is necessary to keep salts from building up. To further avoid salt toxicity and to be on the safe side, one can always use less fertilizer than the recommended rate.

For more information or for answers to your questions, contact your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office. Here on the Shore call either 678-7946 or 787-1361