

## Going Around in Circles

by Fran Benton

In my past life I was considered a kind, decent person. Years of gardening have changed me into a serial killer ruthlessly eliminating non-performing plants in the garden. My usual tactic is to take lots of cuttings and get them rooted, and then go in for the kill. But what went wrong? A failure to thrive? Bugs and disease?



Monty Don on BBC's "Gardener's World" talked about plant roots following the shape of a pot. He said that as a plant grows in a pot, plant roots grow to the side of the pot and then circles around it's edges. In the end the roots will fill the pot and the plant dies. This happened with one of my old lavenders. The poor thing was so pot bound it strangled itself. What is the obvious conclusion here? Go knock your plants out of their pots and look at the roots. If you look at the holes in the bottom of the pot and see roots hanging out, that plant wants to be repotted.

Nursery plants that have spent too long in the nursery are often pot bound. The longer they sit in a nursery, the worse they get. Approach 'end of season' sales with caution! If you are repotting root bound plants follow garden presenter Alan Titchmarsh's advice. Most plants are pretty tough and will grow better with their roots thinned and pruned.

*"Try to peel the roots away from the ball they have formed. For **annuals**, just tear the compacted roots with your hands. I tear off the bottom and then rip up the sides. Sounds brutal, but it works. For bigger tougher roots, I take a serrated knife or sharp shovel and cut the roots, either making slices down the sides of the plant or making a cross cut on the bottom of the plant, then spreading out the four quarters I'm left with. While it's better to try to buy a plant that is not root bound, I find that sometimes there is no choice. Almost **all mums**, and many spring flowers--**pansies**, violas and many **hanging baskets** are totally root bound." Some houseplants prefer to be pot bound - peace lily, spider plant, African violets, aloe, umbrella tree, ficus, agapanthus, asparagus fern, spider lily, Christmas cactus, jade plant, snake plant, and Boston fern.*

Or you could chuck the whole damned thing in the compost and go buy yourself a new plant! Happy gardening!