Houseplant Handout
Creating a Happy Home for Houseplants
by Ann Amato

Potting Soil

Take it from me, a horticulturist who's grown and potted up thousands of plants grown from seeds, cuttings, and plugs… Welcome to my table! The potting table, the potting bench.

There is no ONE right answer as to what to use—*there are many solutions*. Solutions should always be based though on what the plant is, how it grows in the wild (hybrids can of course be based on their parents), and what the growing conditions are in your location.

The issue here is that there are many *wrong* ways to go about doing this—with many folks suggesting things that are either unnecessary, simply not accurate because they're based on one singular growing situation, or ideas are based on personal preference. I'm not here to sell you on anything, I just want to show you what I know based on the hours of hard work I've learned from over the years.

Like any good recipe passed around, there are *many* variations and explanations for using this (or that) in a soil.

INGREDIENTS FOR YOUR OWN POTTING PANTRY

Charcoal: helps with drainage and can hold additional nutrients. Can be "activated" with other things like microbes for the soil.
LECA: Light Expanded Clay Aggregate, useful as a soilless alternative.
Lechuza-Pon: Substrate that is a soilless alternative. This product is not for me, but many others have great success with it.
Orchid Bark: Comes in many sizes, and if often from Doug firs but can come from pine as well. I use both for different things.
Perlite: crushed volcanic material that is lightweight, absorbent, and porous. It is washed and headed at a high temperature This causes it to expand. It retains water well. Best for aeration.
Pumice: Volcanic rock. It retains moisture and aerates the soil.
Rock Wool: Spun from crushed basaltic rock made into fine fibers. It aerates and holds moisture.
Rootshield Plus: A granular preventative biofungicide for control of major root diseases. (Expensive for the home grower but useful in the trade.)
Sphagnum Moss: At home I use both purchased premium grade long fiber as well as live sphagnum that I grow in flats. Allows for oxygen to reach roots and retains water.
Vermiculite: a volcanic material. It contains magnesium, iron and aluminum. Best for holding water.
Worm Castings: Worm manure that's organic compost. (I have worm bins for vermicompost.)

Epiphytic Plants Indoors
When you run out of shelf space for all your beloved houseplants, go vertical and use your walls! Join a horticulturist and houseplant geek to discover easy techniques to mount your epiphytic plants. From bromeliads to huperzias (club mosses), orchids to gesneriads (African violet relatives), each has its specific requirements needed to grow into the best possible specimen plant. Sometimes doing so in a small terrarium is best. Always doing so with adequate light is key to your success.

Plants for mounts
Aeschynanthus
Anthurium
begonias (some)
bromeliads
Columnea
Dischidia
Epiphyllum
Hoya
Huperzia
orchids
philodendrons (some)
Platycerium
Rhipsalis

Materials for mounts
cork bark
driftwood
grapewood
tree fern bark
untreated boards (cedar, juniper)