



# ask the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

## Welcome to my weekly series!

Email or mail your questions to: [info@sprigsandtwigs.net](mailto:info@sprigsandtwigs.net) or Linda Lillie, Sprigs & Twigs Inc, PO Box 245, Gales Ferry, CT 06335

**Question #1 this Week:** *In the fall, I usually dump the contents of my annual planters and pots into a pile in the woods, then store them in my shed over the winter. Is there anything I should be doing to my pots before I put them away? ... Connie*

**Linda's Answer:** A general cleaning is a good thing to do. If you have a functioning compost pile, dispose of the old potting soil into the compost pile. The temperature a compost pile gets to will kill off most weed seeds and pathogens and in the spring you'll have some great planting medium to use. Wipe out the remaining dirt and roots from the pots and planters with a rag or brush, wash them off and then store for the winter. Although a well-established plant shouldn't be affected by a pot that isn't sterilized, some people believe in sterilizing their pots before winter. This helps eliminate any doubt about fungal spores, insect eggs and disease organisms that might affect next year's plants in the container. If you had a disease issue with plants in a particular pot, then you definitely want to sterilize it before storing. There are two methods:



- **Heat Method:** Metal or clay pots can be boiled. Terra cotta pots can be baked in an oven to kill off pathogens, or
- **Liquid Cleaning Solution Method:** Any type of pot can be washed with a cleaning solution. 1 part bleach and 10 parts water OR 1 part vinegar and 1 part water. Let the pot soak in the mixture then rinse and dry thoroughly. After dried they'll be ready for the potting shed.

When you store your freshly cleaned pots, put them in a plastic tote or garbage bag. This helps prevent critters from calling them home over the winter. If you have terra cotta pots, try rubbing them down with some linseed oil to help moisturize them and brighten up their color. In the spring, seedlings should always be started in a sterilized container. A few steps now will lead to a happy 2016 growing season!

*Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 19 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects..*

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