

Basket cases treated in CCC plant hospital

By Cindy Ralston
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Horticulture instructor Phil Evans (above) examines the needs of two members of the *Pilea* species. Below Linda Corbett tends a sick Wandering Jew. Both Evans and Corbett are involved with the CCC plant hospital.

Those who own house plants realize how hard it is to keep plants healthy and growing well.

Changes in temperature, too much or too little light or water, not enough nitrogen or other nutrients, too small a pot or insect infestation may all result in an unhealthy plant or eventually no plant at all.

Clackamas Community College, however, has a new program started by the horticulture department which offers individuals the opportunity to bring in house plants that are not doing well.

Horticulture instructor Phil Evans and horticulture work study student Linda Corbett diagnose, water, feed and fertilize plants in what could be called a plant hospital.

The work is actually done in a greenhouse and so far the program has received 20-30 plants that have been brought in by students.

"Some of the plants that are brought in are basket cases," said Evans. He diagnoses the problem and then attempts to solve it and make the plant healthy again.

Some of the problems encountered by Evans are easy to diagnose and some are difficult. "It's fun trying to diagnose what went wrong," said Evans, "and it gives students a chance to see difficult situations."

"Many plants are overgrown instead of really sick," said Evans. This situation is remedied by taking cuttings from the plant and repotting them.

A Wandering Jew (*Zebrina pendula*) was brought in for example, that was long, straight and nearly leafless. After taking cuttings and planting them in the same pot, the plant looked like new.

Some plants may be over watered, such as the Christmas or Thanksgiving Cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgesii*) that was brought

in. The plant had green and yellow-green leaves with crimson highlights, indicating a history of nitrogen deficiency and severe drought. Careful watering and fertilizing will solve this problem if the roots of the plant are not too damaged.

Evans said not much can be done for plants brought in that are suffering from root rot. Symptoms of root rot include looking wilted and turning themselves downward. The leaves may look as though they are hanging limp, but actually they are holding themselves down.

A plant suffering from root rot sometimes can be saved by taking cuttings and rooting them.

Evans said however, that a root rot often produces poisons that travel out the vascular system of a plant. Cuttings therefore may not survive.

Evans said a plant was even brought in with mushrooms growing beside it, which was obviously a result of too wet conditions.

Often a plant will simply be brought in too small a pot such as a Silver Friendship Plant (a *Pilea* species) brought in. The plant had appeared healthy when bought from a supermarket and had been transplanted from its two inch pot, probably dreid out frequently as it had been planted in a larger pot. It had had room for new, less compact growth and a sufficient amount of water to grow well.

Plants suffering from warm conditions also grow poorly and the leaves turn brown and dry. Dropping of leaves may be a symptom of too warm conditions. Generally the only remedy for this is to move the plant to a cooler, more humid room.

Occasionally misting the plant to keep it moist will not do.

Grouping plants or providing them with water but raising the pots with gravel so their bases aren't sitting in water (to avoid root suffocation and root rot) will help raise the humidity.

"We would like people to bring in plants," said Evans, "but if they have certain problems sometimes nothing can be done. We would like to see plants brought in so they can be saved."

Evans said he would welcome donations of new plants or plant starts and gladly trade plants for something new.

"We are currently trying to build up a stock of plants to put in the offices out the campus," said Evans. "If we have a large enough supply we may put plants in stairwells and other locations on campus."

Evans began work this year as a horticulture instructor at CCC and taught horticulture at a community college in California.

He has studied soils and horticulture for six years, working mainly in landscaping during that period.

"Our goal is to get the horticulture program tied into campus, community and industry," said Evans, "trying to maintain a strong and active horticulture program."

Evans said the horticulture program is designed for the campus and campus community and he hopes to have some type of flower or plant show to play the program efforts and achievements.



Photos by Jerry Wheeler

