

Rejuvenating Used Potting and Container Composts:

Option 1

If you grow container plants, you may just "set it and forget it" when it comes to container soil mix. Unfortunately, over time, **potting soil** loses its lustre as plants feed on it and more or less wash it out. Even though last season's potting mix may not be as fresh as the day you poured it in the pot, you don't need to toss it away.

The easiest way to spruce up old potting soil is by adding well decomposed home-made garden compost. Not only does this give the tired soil a nutritional boost, it also aerates the soil by adding pockets for oxygen and helps the soil maintain moisture, which is often a challenge in containers. Simply combine old potting mix with an equal amount of compost, and you're good to go.

If you don't think a quick mix with compost is going to cut it, you can undertake a more thorough rejuvenation of used potting soil. First wash out excess salts by pouring water through the old soil mix and letting it drain thoroughly. Complete this step a few times to ensure a thorough cleansing. Next, mix the leached soil with an equal amount of sifted compost, and sprinkle in a bit of lime and gypsum, as well as one tablespoon of slow-release fertilizer per gallon of soil.

Mix the soil, compost and additives together and water until it is lightly moist. Place it in a storage bin for a couple weeks to give the microorganisms in the compost time to spread throughout the potting soil. Although it takes a little time, when it's finished, your container plants will have fresh, healthy **potting mix** to set root in.

Option 2

Avid container gardeners are acutely aware of two facts: potting soil becomes depleted over time, and continually replacing it gets expensive. Old potting soil lacks nutrients, is not properly aerated and can cause drainage problems for plants, ultimately forming a brick of dirt that harms plants rather than helps them. Fortunately, rejuvenating old potting soil is easy and inexpensive and gives you an excuse to go outside and play in the dirt.

1. Place the potting soil on a large tarpaulin or similar, and use a garden rake to break up any clumps. Remove any stones/drainage crocks, large root pieces or other debris that is present in the soil.
2. Scoop the soil into a large bucket/container with holes in the bottom. Fill the bucket/container with water, and allow it to drain out the bottom. Allow a couple of days then repeat, and after a further 2 to 3 days spread the soil thinly back out onto the tarpaulin and allow it to dry.
3. Sift some new purchased compost through a 1/2-inch screen, and mix it with the soil you are rejuvenating. Add as much compost as you have depleted potting soil so that you have a 50/50 mix of old potting soil and new compost when you are finished. For an alternative, mix perlite and screened compost into the depleted soil. You can transfer the soil into a large bucket or wheelbarrow if you find it easier to mix the soil in a container rather than on the tarpaulin.
4. Mix in a light dusting of lime and gypsum and 1 tablespoon of slow-release fertilizer for every gallon of soil you have.
5. Moisten the soil mix lightly, and shovel it into a large plastic storage bin. Allow it to cure in the bin for two weeks before using.