

What Is Root Rot?

Root rot is a condition found in both indoor and outdoor plants, although more common in indoor plants with poor drainage. As the name states, the roots of the plant rot. Usually, this is a result of over watering. In houseplants, it is a very common problem, and is slightly less common in outdoor plants. Root rot if left untreated, will kill plants. The first symptoms of root rot occur in the soil, gardeners are often not aware of the problem until it is advanced. When plants start showing symptoms of root rot, such as yellow leaves or stunted growth, take action immediately to resolve the problem.



What Causes Root Rot?

Excessive water might seem like the cause of root rot, however the problem starts because too much water promotes the ideal environment for the truth culprit: Fungus. When plants in soils is too dense for water to drain out efficiently, or perhaps containers that lack sufficient drainage holes, are most susceptible to root rot. Container plants are most at risk, garden plants are not immune to root rot. Most garden root rot issues can be prevented by taking steps to improve soil drainage before planting.

Identifying Root Rot

Root rot can be identified by the presence of soft, brown roots. The root system of a healthy plant should be firm and white. But when soil is soggy, fungal spores multiply and the fungus starts to spread, developing in the extremities of the roots first. As the fungus advances, healthy portions of root turn brown and mushy as the roots die. The plant is then unable to absorb the nutrients it needs, and that deficiency becomes apparent in the condition of plant foliage. Leaves begin to wilt and turn yellow or fall off, growth slows, and blooming may be delayed.

In the most extreme cases, when conditions are ideal for the fungus to spread quickly. Plants can die within 10 days. If these symptoms occur in a plant, loosen the soil around the base of the plant with a hand trowel or shovel and remove the plant from the soil. Gently shake the soil from the roots and inspect them for rot.

Treating Root Rot?

Now you have identified root rot, you must determine if the plant can be saved. If the root system has already become decayed and mushy, then it is too late to save the plant. Although, if the plant roots have healthy, white, firm roots. It is possible to bring the plant back to good health by replanting in fresh soil with proper drainage. Prepare plants for replanting by cleaning the roots gently under running water and removing all rotting roots. Cut the healthy root just above the damaged area. Work quickly to replant within a few hours. Sterilize the shears or scissors with a solution of 1 part bleach to 3 parts water to avoid spreading fungal spores to other plants or soil.



1. Use a container with several small drainage holes or one large drainage hole to ensure proper water drainage. When reusing old containers, first disinfect it by soaking it in a solution of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water for half an hour
2. DO NOT reuse the old soil, and resist using garden soil, which can contain a number of pathogens (fungus). Fill the container with 2 parts store-bought soil, 2 parts peat moss and 1 part perlite.
3. Dig a hole in the soil at least twice the width of the root ball to avoid crowding roots. Place the plant in the hole, cover and water thoroughly.

Treating In Outdoor Gardens

In most situations improving soil drainage and adding amendments is sufficient to prevent future problems. Extreme cases of root rot may require garden soil replacing. Take the following steps to replant in a garden:

1. Identify low-lying areas that collect water or soil that slopes toward a building. Add drainage channels to direct water away from the garden space if needed. This process ensures that water drains away from garden beds and buildings.
2. To prepare for planting, improve drainage in dense soils by increasing organic material. Soil amendments can be added to help make the nutrients in the soil more available to your plants.
3. Dig a hole in the soil at least twice the width of the root ball to avoid crowding roots. Place the plant in the hole, cover and water thoroughly.

Root rot is a serious issue for gardeners, and treating the problem as soon as symptoms occur greatly increases the chances of saving affected plants. Preventing fungus from thriving in soggy soil by providing good drainage and a healthy soil environment in which your plants can flourish.

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