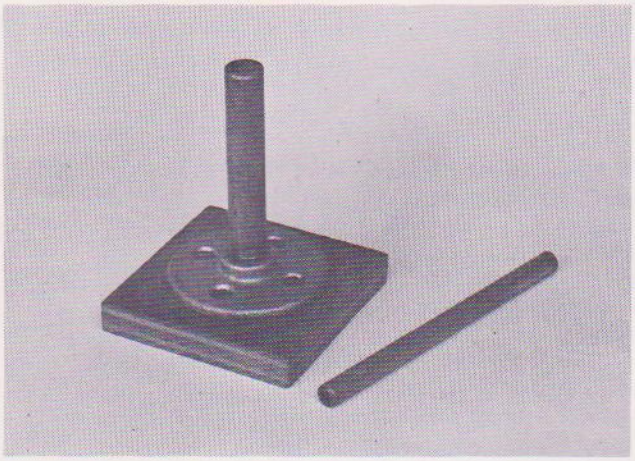

A Good "De-Potting" Tool

FRED BARNS

When re-potting an orchid plant, the usual procedure in removing the plant from a clay pot is to run a knife around the inside of the pot to free the roots which adhere to the clay surfaces — then to raise the plant out of the pot by using a screwdriver as a pry. The business end of the screwdriver necessarily damages some of the live roots of the plant, which, we believe, the plant resents. Also, an unsterilized pry tool can be an efficient means for transmitting any virus or bacterial infection from plant to plant.

A much safer and more convenient method of removing a plant from a clay pot after the roots have been freed with a sterilized knife as above, is by pushing the root ball upward through the drainage hole in the bottom of the pot.

An easily made tool for this purpose consists of a 4″ long piece of ⅜″ galvanized pipe threaded at one end, screwed into a ⅜″ floor flange, as shown in the illustration. With the flange base of the tool resting on the potting bench, place the drainage hole of the pot on the upper end of the pipe, and press the pot downward, causing the plant to rise in the pot for easy removal. Since the end of the pipe plunger bears against the drainage crock in the bottom of the pot, the force of the plunger is distributed over the bottom of the root ball, with little or no damage to the roots of the plant.

The ⅜″ pipe plunger can be used for pots having drainage holes ¾″ or more in diameter. For pots with smaller drainage holes, provide a 6″ long piece of ⅛″ pipe to be placed loosely inside of the ⅜″ pipe plunger.

If the flange base of the tool is fastened to a 4″ square piece of wood about ¾″ thick, the tool will be more stable when used, and also the smaller pipe placed inside the ⅜″ pipe plunger is convenient for storing the complete tool on a shelf.

Any local hardware store that sells pipe fittings can furnish the above pipe materials.

A further suggestion: If the tool when used is placed inside of a plastic dishpan, the loose bark or compost from the pot falls into the pan, instead of being scattered over the potting bench. The discarded material is excellent for spading into the soil of your outdoor garden to add humus to the soil, or as a mulch for plants.

If you do not use much crockery in potting and discard it each time, the pipe end should be sterilized with a torch *to prevent spread of orchid virus.*

Should the Hobbyist Be Concerned About Virus?

FRANK FORDYCE

A most delicate subject — virus. Concerned but not panicked, would be my advice, for until we know more about virus we are making much noise about something of which we know very little. It's much like heart disease, we know it can be serious, we admit it is with us, we recognize some of its symptoms, but we do not yet know all of its many facets and quite frankly do not know of any cures.

We have learned enough to know that virus can be spread from one plant to another, therefore we must take practical precautions. I say "practical" precautions for we realize that no hobbyist maintains a completely sterile laboratory condition within his hobby greenhouse. These precautions fall under the category of general cleanliness. The flaming of tools used in cutting plants or flowers, the washing of hands, the sterilization of pots and wires, the use of pressure-can sealants instead of the old "one dip stick" method of tree-seal.

Keeping plant pests under control is another big factor in eliminating virus possibilities.

There are the so-called "weed tests" to find whether a plant carries virus or not, but I believe the final certain test is still the electron microscope. More and more combinations of virus are being found, not only in plants but in the human body as well.

It finally amounts to the practical identification of the viruses we know today. Several articles have been published by leading authorities in the field and a handbook is available from the American Orchid Society to aid you in their identification. It is still a puzzle to most growers as to whether a plant actually has virus or whether the symptoms are in fact a bacterial or fungal condition, a fertilizer or sodium burn, or some other complex indication of an imbalance of nutrients.

Until we have more facts at hand we must do the practical thing, discard plants with color break virus in the flowers, discard other known symptoms of virus, and isolate the balance of plants of which we are not quite sure until we can identify the reason for our suspicion. Until you are certain it is virus take reasonable precautions but don't panic and throw away half your collection!