

## MEETING REPORT - Happy, Healthy Houseplants.

Twenty stalwart members braved the winter weather to hear Geoff Hodge, horticultural writer, technical Editor of Garden Answers and Garden News and web editor for the RHS give us a very interesting talk. Audience participation was mandatory and very amusing.

The UK has the reputation worldwide for buying the least number of houseplants, but the highest number for killing them. The main plant-buying season starts at Easter, and the worst problem is finding a suitable place for it. Always ask for a plant sleeve, as hothouse grown plants can receive a fatal temperature shock on the journey before you get them home. Plants stored outside in the cold should be avoided. Try to find a spot where the temperature is even and within the range quoted on the label. Windowsills may be hot during the day and very cold at night. Bring plants in at night. Never put plants in the centre of a room where light levels are too low, but you can obtain "grow lights" to help them. You can now buy indoor growing systems, with grow lights, matting and a drip system for about £60, to get things off to a great start. You can also download a light meter app onto a smartphone. Watering is a big problem too. Watering should be regular enough to keep the compost evenly moist; never allow it to dry out completely and then flood it. Over-watering drives the air out of the compost and the roots die. Water indicators are a waste of money - use your finger! Weigh the pot in your hand each day and you will soon know when it feels lighter and needs watering. Over-feeding is another fault, as it kills the roots. Follow the manufacturer's instructions exactly.

Geoff demonstrated a watering can with a push button release for precise watering. Tap water is fine for all but azaleas, but make sure it is tepid as nobody likes a sudden cold bath. Geoff recommended Mr. Jackson's Flower Power granules for feeding. Growmore pellets last about 2 months, and slow release fertilisers do not work until the soil is wet enough, then last six months. Do mist your houseplants daily with tepid water, or place on damp Hortag expanded clay pellets, which keeps the plant moist for several days. Never repot if your plant is sick, only when it really needs it and the roots are congested, and do it in March to May. Leaf shine is a bad idea, so is milk, as they block the pores. For pests, use Bug Clear Ultra vine weevil killer, which is systemic and kills lots of other pests too. We have found a great speaker in Geoff and hope he will visit us again, and he was very generous with his raffle prizes!