Retailers are suffering unnecessary losses of their indoor plants by over-watering in Winter. Rhonda Foote, sales rep for Andersons Nurseries of Napier, here offers some good advice for garden centre staff on what they should be doing

Be careful with your watering — or you'll lose you indoor plants

IT WAS February and I was sitting in the company vehicle at Picton, waiting for the ferry after another 'tour of duty' travelling around the South Island showing and selling beautiful tropical plants to retail outlets and hire companies.

Unlike my September and November trips, the weather was gorgeous. I was well received and our plants were 'oohed and aahed' over.

But in February, a few retailers were reluctant to buy as, coming into Winter, they find they have a lot of losses if they haven't sold their plants by then.

We were really just starting the first month of Autumn, but it certainly felt cooler in Invercargill when I was there.

My best advice to them, as a way of preventing unnecessary losses, was to be very careful with watering through this cooler period.

These plants come from a much warmer climate but also one that has very little rain during winter. So please keep them drier than normal.

There also seemed to be an enormous amount of frustration over who was doing the watering.

Rhonda Foote – no staff should be allowed to water indoor plants unless they have been trained in Winter watering

There were those diligent staff at every garden centre who were very careful with their watering regimes only to find that during their days off 'Ms Nobody' or 'part timers' came in and soaked the lot – whether the plants needed watering or not. In no time, the plants rotted or collapsed.

Now come on! Who's in charge here?

There should be one person in control and no-one else should be allowed to water unless advised and trained for winter watering.

I even heard of a hose being pulled in to soak the plants in mid-Winter. They must have shivered to their very roots.

Use a small amount of tepid water, preferably in the morning and only where necessary.

For example, Sansevieria can go a couple of months without water. Wait till the leaves start closing down and then just a cupful is adequate.

Of course, it's not just a South Island problem.

North Island outlets lost a lot of indoor plants during our last northern Winter too, as it was unseasonably cold and they were kept too wet.

But it's these losses which make many buyers reluctant to stock a wide range of plants and then we all lose out – the grower, the retailer and finally the public who, just when they are thinking 'indoors', find there isn't the variety available.

When I return to the Mainland near the end of the year, I hope to see those diligent waterers in charge of happy plants.

The owners will be happy too as it is they who have to wear the losses of badly-watered indoor plants.

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