

Plants and Youth: Making a Totem¹

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Vining foliage plants grown on slabs of tree fern or bark are called totems. Climbing types of foliage plants such as grape ivy, English ivy, wax plant, philodendrons and pothos are good choices for totems. Select a container that has drainage holes in the bottom and is large enough for the plant of your choice and the slab it will grow upon. Choose a slab that is 3 to 5 times taller than the container. Hold the slab upright in the container, and then pack 2 to 4 inches of potting mix firmly around it (Figure 1). Set the plant in the pot and add more potting mix (Figure 2). Never set the plant in the soil deeper than it was growing originally. Fasten the stems to the slab with tape, twist ties or string until roots attach themselves (Figure 3).



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

Totems require the same amount of care as any other potted foliage plant. They should receive indirect light, enough water to keep the soil moist and occasional applications of diluted, soluble, houseplant fertilizer. In a few months, the entire totem should be covered by the foliage plant.

Definition of Terms

Bark slab - The outside piece of wood with attached bark cut from a log.

Fern slab - A section of the trunk of tree fern.

Foliage plants - Plants grown primarily for the beauty of their leaves and stems. Foliage plants are susceptible to cold injury, so they are usually grown indoors.

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Potting mix - A material developed by combining several substances (peat, perlite, pine bark, sand, etc.) for growing plants in pots.