

Propagating Plants For The Home Landscape

Homegrown plants can offer lots of plants for your landscape for a lot less money than buying from retailers. Propagation can be from seeds, by cutting, layering, or by division. The two most popular methods of propagation of woody plants are cutting and layering. The ideal time of year to propagate depends on the method and plants you use.

Cuttings

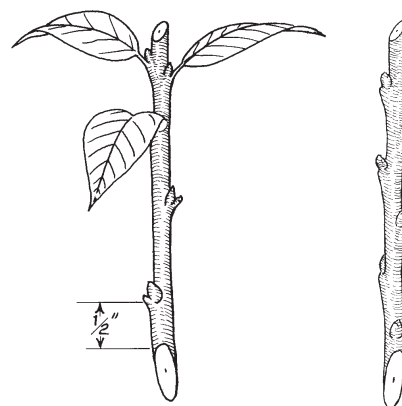
A cutting is any part cut from the parent plant and rooted to form a new plant. The cutting can be from the main stem, lateral branch, root, or a leaf. Cuttings vary from softwood (current season's growth), hardwood (dormant), or semihard wood (after current season's growth has hardened).

Softwood Cuttings

For softwood cuttings, the new growth should be firm, mature, and slightly brittle. Take the cuttings in June, July, and August. Cuttings taken before June usually are too soft and rot easily. Cuttings after August are usually too woody and root slowly.

Before cutting, select branches that appear in the "right" stage of growth. To determine the "right" condition, test the branch by bending it to about a 90-degree angle. If it snaps instead of bending, it is "right" for making a softwood cutting.

Make cuttings with pruning shears or a sharp knife. Cut about half an inch below the node on a stem; cut at a slant. Remove the lower half of foliage, but be sure to leave at least one-third of the upper foliage to make food (photosynthesis) and enhance rooting. Always remove flower buds.



Dip the base of the cutting in a rooting hormone (such as Rootone) to hasten rooting. Some plants root easily without a growth hormone. Place the cuttings in a pot or box filled with a well-drained rooting medium. (Put cuttings about 2 inches apart, and keep the rooting medium moist at all times.)

Remember, at first, cuttings have no roots. It is important to keep cuttings out of the sun and stick in the medium as soon as possible to reduce water loss. Use a fine mist to prevent wetting the rooting medium too much.

Most softwood cuttings root in 4 to 6 weeks. When roots are about 1/2 to 3/4 inch long, transplant into a permanent location or place in a container for further growth.

Plants that root easily from softwood cuttings include azalea, aucuba, crapemyrtle, boxwood, camellia, Chinese holly, English ivy, jasmine, Japanese holly, photinia, and privet.



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Hardwood Cuttings

A hardwood cutting is made from a plant while it is dormant or after it has completed its annual growth and the wood has had time to become hardened. Normally, hardwood cuttings are made in December, January, and February. Cuttings should be from tip growth, about 4 to 8 inches long with four to six buds per cutting. Hardwood cuttings take much longer than softwood cuttings to root, but hardwood cuttings are easier to handle and are less perishable. You can put the cuttings in an outdoor propagation box or directly outdoors in a well-drained soil. Stick cuttings deep – leaving only the top 4 inches exposed.

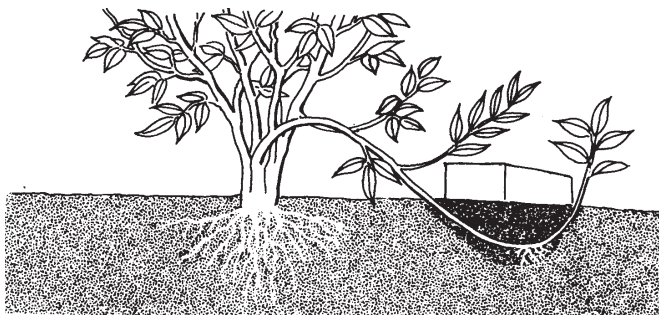
Plants that root easily from hardwood cuttings include althaea, crapemyrtle, forsythia, hydrangea, quince, rose, spirea, and wisteria.

Semihardwood Cuttings

Semihardwood cuttings are made after the current season's growth has hardened but before plant has become dormant (August through October). As with other types of cuttings, do not let semihardwood cuttings dry out. Plants that root easily from semihardwood cuttings include camellia, Chinese holly, Japanese holly, and juniper.

Layering

Another way to propagate is layering, a technique that lets the cutting stay with the parent plant until it has rooted. Bend a branch to the soil. Dig a shallow trench to bury part of the branch; cover with soil and a heavy object (such as a brick) to hold until rooting occurs. Another form of layering is air-layering, and



the branch does not need to be buried. A small piece of bark is cut from the branch, where rooting hormone is applied. Wrap some moist peat moss around the wound and a piece of plastic film to hold the peat moss. You can cut the new plants from the parent plant when roots are well formed. Landscape plants that layer easily include azalea, camellia, Chinese holly, euonymus, Japanese holly, and juniper.

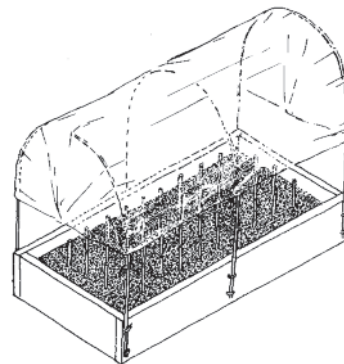
Rooting Medium

The medium you use for rooting should be free of insects, diseases, and weed pests. It should be porous to allow good air exchange and water drainage. Some excellent mixes are one part clean, sharp, sand and one part shredded peat moss; one part clean, sharp, sand and one part perlite; or one part clean, sharp, sand, one part perlite, and one part shredded peat moss. Measure by volume and not by weight. Do not apply fertilizer until the cuttings have a well-established root system.

How To Make A Propagation Box

Use lumber to make a simple rectangular frame. Lumber size for the side walls can be 1 inch by 6 inches or 1 inch by 8 inches. No bottom is necessary. (A box 3 feet by 4 feet is large enough to hold several hundred cuttings.) Use PVC pipe, reinforcement rods, conduit pipe, or lattice to make bows to hold a clear plastic cover (over top of box) to help save humidity and prevent cuttings from drying out.

Place the box in a half-sun, well-drained area. Fill the box 5 to 6 inches deep with a rooting medium.



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