

SOFTWOOD CUTTING PROPAGATION

There are several different methods of taking cuttings from your plants with the purpose of rooting those cuttings to create a new plant. Some plants will be easier to root than others and some methods will work better with different types of plants. There is a great deal of information available on specific plants for more advanced propagation, but for the home gardener, here are some basic tips to follow for the different methods of softwood cuttings.

We will discuss cuttings taken from the tip or stem of the plant, though many plants (such as begonias, African violets, or snake plant) will root from just a single leaf cutting. Cuttings should be taken from a healthy plant to ensure the health and vigor of the new plants. Take cuttings in the morning before high temperatures have drained the plant's water supply. Cuttings usually root best when they are taken from the soft, green tissue within 8-10 inches from the tip of the shoot. Those cuttings can then be cut into smaller cuttings, provided there are enough nodes for additional cuttings. A node is the point where a leaf connects to the stem and is most often the point where new roots will form. Each cutting should have at least two nodes, but four is best. From the cuttings, remove the leaves from the two lower nodes. These will be planted below the soil. The leaves on the upper two nodes should be left in tact to absorb light for rooting, but if there are too many leaves or if some leaves are large, remove those to limit the amount of water lost due to transpiration.

Have your planting media prepared before you take your cuttings so they can be planted immediately. You can use potting soil as your media, especially if you are rooting many cuttings. If you are using potting soil, have your pot filled with a quality soil or soil-less mix, like Berger. After preparing the cutting and removing the lower leaves, it is generally beneficial to dip the lower portion of the cutting in a rooting compound, such as RootTone. Make your hole for the cutting in the soil by using a pencil to the depth of the bottom half of the cutting. Just shoving the cutting into the soil will knock off too much of the rooting compound. Place the cutting into your prepared hole to above the two lower nodes, gently push the soil around the cutting to hold it in place, and water well. Now place your potted cuttings in an area away from direct hot sun, but with plenty of light. Humidity is important to the success of the cuttings because without it, the cutting will transpire the water it contains and doesn't have roots to take up more water. When using soil as a media, keep the cuttings consistently watered, never soggy. Misting the leaves several times a day or using a humidity tray will help keep humidity levels high. You can make a humidity tray by placing gravel in a tray, putting the potted cuttings on the gravel and keeping water in the tray filled to the level of the gravel and not up to the base of the pot. It is best to provide these conditions until you are certain the cuttings have rooted and are putting on new growth. Then, slowly acclimate the new plants out of their protected environment into the proper light exposure.

A method I like to use in home propagation involves using perlite as the potting media. Cuttings are taken the same way, dipped in rooting compound, and planted in a pot full of perlite. The pot should then be placed in a large plastic bag. This can be a large zipper-style bag or a bread bag. In either case, it is important to use stakes in the pot to keep the plastic from directly touching the cuttings. Water the cuttings and seal the bag. Place the cuttings in the same type of light as previously described and leave it alone for a week. The sealed bag keeps humidity levels high and eliminates the need for watering. After 1-2 weeks, start acclimating the cutting to lower humidity levels. Start by opening the bag for 5-10 minutes a day in the morning. Opening the bag will create a loss of moisture, and may require an occasional watering. When the cutting has started putting on new leaves, try leaving the bag open longer, even all day if the plant can take it. If the plant starts to wilt, close the bag. If it can go all day with the bag open, start by lowering the bag and then eventually removing the rooted cutting from the bag. Once acclimated, you can repot the rooted cutting into potting soil or your landscape, if desired.

Propagation by cutting is never a sure thing. But some plants will root easily and with practice, so will many others. If you have any questions, call us at Little Red Riding Hood Nursery. We will have all the answers and supplies you'll need!

If you have any question please call, write or drop by:

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