

Get Free Plants: Propagate Like the Pros

by Charlie Nardozzi at GardeningwithCharlie.com

Many gardeners would love more of their favorite plants, but shy away from the expense of buying them. You can save money and still have those plants by propagating them yourself.



Sexual vs Asexual Propagation

Sexual Propagation leads to a greater diversity of plant forms, better production and pest controls through hybridization. Often done through pollinating flowers and crossing varieties to produce new seed. The offspring usually are not identical to the parents.

Asexual Propagation leads to uniformity, preserving old varieties and is a faster way to grow larger plants. The new plants are identical to the parents.

I'm mostly talking about Asexual Propagation in this talk.

Types of Asexual Propagation

Division is when roots, tubers and young offshoot plants are split to create new plants. Dahlias, canna lilies, daylilies, hostas, peony and iris are common perennials that are divided by their roots. Division can also occur when plants create young plants off a mother plant. These can be divided simply by digging them out and cutting them off from the mother plant. These include African violets, Chinese money plants and succulents. You can also remove and root young plants from a stem such as with spider plants.

Cuttings: Taking cuttings is the most common way to propagate a perennial asexually. It involves cutting a piece of leaf, stem or root and propagating a new plant from them. Using a rooting hormone powder on the cut end will stimulate faster rooting. Here are some different types of cuttings.

Herbaceous Cuttings are taken any time of year from non-woody plants. These include geraniums, fuchsia, coleus, African violet and basil. You can cut a leaf or green stem from these plants and they usually root within a few weeks depending on the plant. Take a 4- to 6-inch long cutting from the tip of the stem, remove the bottom leaves, dab with rooting hormone powder to root. For leaves, simply place the leaf, or leaf and petiole, in the potting soil and rooting hormone powder and keep moist and humid.

Woody Cuttings are taken at different times of year depending on the plant and type of cutting. They usually are taken off woody trees and shrubs. Rooting hormone powder is usually used for all of these cuttings.

Softwood Cuttings are woody cuttings taken in early summer, (ie: June) while the new growth is still green and not woody. Hydrangeas, honeysuckle and lavender are common shrubs propagated this way. Cut a stem that's firm but still bends and snaps and remove 3 to 5 inches of stem for the cutting. Cut below a leaf node or set of leaves at a 45 degree angle and root.

Hardwood Cuttings are woody cuttings taken from older wood when the plant is dormant. Ninebark, viburnum, fig, grape and ceanothus are some plants that often are propagated by hardwood cuttings. You can take multiple cuttings per stem. The cuttings should be 6-to 8-inches long, cut below a node. Remove bottom leaves, if evergreen. Cut stems that are 2 years old wood and not older wood for best results. Some of these woody plants can be propagated by softwood cuttings as well. They will take several months to root.

Layering is wounding the long stem of a plant and anchoring it to the ground to grow roots. Raspberry, rhododendron and forsythia are some woody plants that can be propagated by layering. Simply find a long stem that's still pliable and will reach the ground. Bend it to the ground and, where it touches the soil, scar the bark with a knife and dab some rotting hormone powder on the wound. Bury this portion of the stem but leave the end of the stem sticking out. Anchor it down with tent stakes or a rock. It should root within 6 months. Once rooted, cut it off from the mother plant and transplant.

Air Layering is making a scar on woody stems and forcing them to root, while still on the plant, within an artificial soil medium that's wrapped around the scar. This technique can be used to propagate houseplants, such as dracena, croton, rubber tree and fig, as well as woody shrubs such as camellia, magnolia and rhododendron. For landscape plants, scar the wood in spring. For houseplants you can propagate at any time.

Find a one year old stem for outdoor plants and 1 or 2 year old stem for houseplants. Go up the stem tip and select a stem area between leaf nodes. Remove the leaves near the scar area, if necessary. With a sharp knife, make a 1- to 2-inch long cut into the stem and remove the outer bark around the stem leaving the inner wood exposed. Douse the wound with rooting hormone powder and then wrap it with slightly moistened sphagnum peat moss. Wrap the peat moss ball around the wound area and cover with plastic. Secure with plant ties on top and bottom. It should form roots in 2 to 3 months depending on the plant.

Soil & Pots

Use regular potting soil or Coir as the planting medium. It's important it is well-drained so cuttings don't rot, yet holds water so they don't dry out. For trees and shrubs, use deeper plastic pots that allow for the roots to expand before transplanting. For rooting hormone powder, look for ones with either IBA (Indole-3-Butyric Acid) or NAA (Naphthalene Acetic Acid) as the active hormone ingredient.