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House Plant Propagation

Indoor gardeners may want to propagate a house plant. Some plants get too big and need to be started over. Each plant will only respond to a few or only one of the many propagation techniques. Some methods of propagation are easy, others are more complicated. Know what methods work with a particular plant then use the one that seems to be the most effective.

A stem cutting is a terminal growing point on a plant. It is 4 to 6 inches long and is cut off at a node. A node is the point on a stem where a leaf is attached. The bottom leaves are removed from and the lower end is inserted into the rooting medium. Remove any flowers or flower buds that may be present.

Leaf section cuttings are made by cutting a leaf into pieces. Keep track of which is the lower end by notching the top of the cutting when it is made. Cuttings inserted into the rooting medium upside down will not root. Entire leaf cuttings are used with plants such as rex begonia. All of the leaf blade is used but not the leaf stem or petiole. About 1/3 of the leaf blade is inserted into the rooting medium.

Leaf petiole cuttings are made up of the leaf blade plus the leaf stem or petiole. African violets are often propagated in this way. Do not use very young leaves. The petiole is inserted into the rooting medium.

A leaf bud cutting is made when part of the plant is cut off and sectioned. Each stem section has a leaf, or set of leaves, attached. The length of the attached stem can range from one to several inches, depending on leaf size. The stem is buried horizontally in the rooting medium with the leaf sticking up. If the leaves are in pairs on opposite sides of the stem, the stem may be split down the middle.

Cane cuttings are also called stem section cuttings. Cuttings are made by cutting a stem into sections. Each section must have a bud on it. Place the sections horizontally in the rooting medium with the bud side up and only the bottom side covered with soil.

Air layering is useful when plants become too large for their growing area. Air layering is the rooting of a stem terminal while it is still attached to the plant. First, cut the stem at a point just below a leaf. The cut should be about an inch long and go about half way through the stem. Insert a wooden match stick or toothpick into the cut to keep it open. If wood is not inserted into the cut, it may heal without rooting. Next, wrap the cut in moist sphagnum moss. The ball of moss should be about the size of a large orange or small grapefruit. Cover the moss with aluminum foil or plastic and secure the ends with string, tape or wire ties. Check the moss every few days to make sure it is still moist. When the roots are well developed, cut the stem below the root ball and pot up the new plant. Air layering is slow, taking as long as two to three months.

Division is one of the easiest methods of plant propagation. A crowded plant can be removed from its pot and cut into two or more sections. Each section is potted up separately.



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Propagation - Continued-

All propagation methods require a rooting media that can be one of several things. One of the possibilities is vermiculite. This material is light, readily available, and easy to work with. Check it often for dryness. It drains well and many plants will root very nicely in vermiculite.

Cover rooting cuttings with a plastic tent. The tent keeps the humidity high and prevents drying out. Do not completely enclose the cuttings in plastic as some air circulation is necessary. Place sticks or wire in the pot to support the plastic. Drape the plastic over the supports, leaving it open at the bottom.

Once rooted cuttings can be potted up and placed in their new growing area. Do not delay potting until the plants are large with extensive root systems. More root injury will result from waiting.