

PLANT PROPAGATION

Propagation is the scientific way to describe creating new plants from existing ones. Many garden plants are easy to propagate with no special knowledge or equipment. All you need to know is the right strategy for the specific plant. Once you do, you can get more from the plants you already have in your garden and move them to a new spot or share them with another gardener, maybe in exchange for different varieties.

Seeds

The simplest type of plant propagation is collecting seeds from mature plants and growing them the next season. **Many types of seeds, such as peppers, dill, and marigolds, need only to be gathered, dried, and stored in a dry container away from direct sunlight.** Bear in mind that vegetable and flowers seeds from open-pollinated plants will produce plants just like the “parent” plants. The seeds from hybrid varieties, on the other hand, may grow up to be very different from their parents. Check seed packets to determine if a variety is open-pollinated or a hybrid, sometimes labeled as F1.

Best for: Annual vegetables, herbs, and flowers

Division

Plants with clusters of rooted crowns can be divided into smaller pieces and planted separately. First, dig up the entire root ball of the plant. If the stems are not tightly joined, you can gently pull the plants apart with your fingers. For crowns connected by thicker horizontal stems, slice them apart with a sharp spade or garden knife. Try to make a single clean cut and avoid hacking at the roots of tough clumps. The best time to divide plants is when they are dormant. In general, divide spring- and summer-blooming plants in fall and fall-blooming varieties in spring. Water plants the day before you plan to divide them so that they come up easily from the ground. Replant divisions as soon as possible to the same depth as the parent plant. Keep them well-watered until you see new growth coming up.

Best for: Perennials just as irises, hostas, daylilies, rhubarb, and ornamental grasses.

Cuttings

Many plants can be propagated by cutting off a leaf, stem, or small shoot and letting it grow roots before replanting it. Starting a new shrub or other woody plant from a cutting is most challenging and takes the most patience, but for many species you need only to cut a short piece of a branch. **No matter which plant you’re propagating,** take cuttings with a sharp blade to avoid injuring the parent

plant. Remove flowers and flower buds from cuttings so that they direct their energy and stored carbohydrates into root formation. In most cases, the best medium for rooting cuttings is a loose mix of peat and perlite. Moisten the medium before inserting the cuttings and keep it evenly moist as the plants start rooting and forming new shoots. Keep the cuttings in bright, but indirect light and be patient. Root formation can take a few weeks. You’ll know you’ve succeeded when you see the plant starting to put out new shoots and leaves.

Best for: Fleshy leaved plants, such as coleus and geraniums, many succulents, and a few woody plants, such as hydrangea. Tomatoes and basil can both be propagated from leaf cuttings.

Layering

With some species, stems still attached to the parent plants will form roots and become self-sufficient when they are in contact with soil or other growing medium. This type of vegetative propagation, called layering, is facilitated by wounding one side of the stem or by bending it very sharply. **For canes such as raspberries and for shrubs with flexible stems, you dig a hole 3 to 4 inches deep, bend and insert a shoot tip and cover it with soil.** The tip grows downward first, then bends sharply and grows upward. Roots form at the bend and the stem can be cut off and grown as a new plant. To air layer, you give a stem a shallow cut or wound a few inches below the tip to stimulate root production, and then wrap moist sphagnum moss around the wound. Enclose the moss and wound with a thin sheet of plastic wrap to hold in moisture and keep the moss in place.

Best for: Berries such as raspberries and blackberries, camellias, forsythias, witch hazel

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