

Try this Painless, Inexpensive Plant Rooting Method

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This is the best time of year for propagating your favorite woody shrub or herbaceous plant from cuttings. Plants reproduced by this method are genetically identical to the parent plant.

The "thirty minute painless method" is a technique that can be used to root dozens of plants at home without the need for a mist system or other specialized equipment. To get started you will need the following supplies:

- ! Established, healthy plants from which to take cuttings.
- ! A pair of sharp hand pruners.
- ! Clean plastic nursery pots (1, 2 or 3 gallon size) with drain holes.
- ! Well-drained sterile media such as perlite, vermiculite or fine pine bark.
- ! A sheet of clear plastic or large, clear plastic bags.
- ! Root promoter such as Rootone, Hormodin or Dip-N-Grow.

Prepare the pots for the sticking of cuttings by making sure that they are clean. Recycled pots should be thoroughly washed and rinsed. Fill each pot only half full of the well drained potting mixture. Avoid fine textured mixtures that look like soil – they won't work. Water well to thoroughly wet the medium.

Take cuttings early in the morning. Using sharp pruners remove 4 to 5 inch long pieces of terminal shoots from current season's growth. Immediately place them in a plastic bag, or a cooler if temperatures are high.

Once cuttings have been collected, prepare to stick them without delay. In a cool, shaded area recut the base of each cutting. Make a slanted cut just below a joint or node. Dip the base in a root promoter and stick it in the medium just deep enough to make it stand up without support. The spacing can be relatively close – about 2 inches apart is suggested. A six inch nursery pot will easily root a dozen cuttings.

As soon as each pot is filled with the desired number of cuttings, water again. This helps to settle the medium around the cutting bases.

Stretch a clear plastic sheet tightly over the top of each pot and secure it with a large rubber band or string. If the pot was not filled excessively, and if the cuttings are not extremely long, the plastic should not touch the cuttings. Another option is to place the entire pot in a large, clear plastic bag and seal it.

Place this completed "propagation unit" in a bright area, but in a place that never receives direct sun. Check once each week by making sure that condensation is forming inside of the plastic. As long as beads of moisture are seen, do not disturb. If the amount of condensation decreases, remove the top,

water again, allow excess water to drain and replace the cover.

Rooting of many plants occurs within 4 to 6 weeks. When new roots are about 1 inch long, pot up the cuttings and grow them until the new plants are ready for moving to a permanent place in the landscape.

This is a simple method that works. The procedure provides an environment for the cuttings that is clean, with a humidity level of near 100 percent until new roots are formed. Some nurseries still use this technique on a larger scale. It is known as the "sweat tent" method, and is used for germinating some seeds as well as rooting certain kinds of cuttings.

A word of warning: Most failures when rooting cuttings are the result of using potting media that is too fine textured. Avoid mixtures that are heavy and look like soil. Rotten cuttings are guaranteed with this procedure if you use yard dirt!

For more information about gardening in our area, visit the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension website at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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