Growing Roses from Cuttings

Photo by David W. Marshall, Leon County Extension UF-IFAS: Rose

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Roses are extremely easy to root from cuttings. I even have a shortcut method of rooting them. I simply make a cutting and place it directly in a spot in my flower garden where a rose plant is needed. Provided the cutting receives regular irrigation, a cutting placed in December will produce roses in the spring.

A cutting is any detached plant part which, under favorable conditions for regeneration, will produce a new plant identical to the parent plant. Cuttings can be made from stems, leaf-buds, or roots. But stem cuttings are the most frequently used type.

To propagate by stem cuttings, segments of shoots containing buds are taken and used to produce new and independent plants. Cuttings taken from outside branches of relatively young plants root more readily than those taken from older plants of the same species. Cuttings should be taken from healthy, vigorous, plants growing in ample sunlight.

Heading or cutting back the main shoots will usually force out numerous lateral branches from which cuttings can be made. Softwood cuttings usually root easier and faster than woodier stem cuttings, taking only five to eight weeks. An important factor in making stem cuttings is obtaining wood of the proper age. Extremely fast growing, soft and tender shoots are not desirable, because they often will deteriorate before rooting. On the other hand, old woody stems are very slow to root. The best cutting material is flexible, but mature enough to break when bent sharply. Bend the stem between thumb and forefinger; if it snaps, tissues are in prime condition for rooting.
To use my method of rooting roses, first choose a stem on the stock plant with a defined fork or “V” where new sturdy branches are growing on either side of the main stem or on both. Cut the stem about two inches below the fork, making a good, clean cut. Make sure that you have a cutting of about 18 inches if you will be planting it directly in place in the flower bed. Remove leaves and smaller branches from the main stem and the forked branches for about 2/3 of the cutting.

Insert a shovel in the ground in the soil where you want the rose to grow. Rock the shovel back and forth to form a wedge pocket behind the shovel. Place the cutting behind the shovel as far into the wedge as possible. Hold the cutting steady as you pull the shovel out and push the cutting further down as you pull the shovel out. Then, place the shovel in the ground immediately in front of the cutting and wedge the soil back against the cutting.

Keep this planted cutting moist and it should produce a rooted plant that will begin new growth in a month or two. Do not fertilize the plant as it is forming roots.

Rapid handling of cuttings after removal from the stock plants is important. Cuttings should be taken in the early morning when stems are turgid and kept in clean, moist conditions and out of the sun at all times until stuck. Soaking of cuttings in water to keep them fresh is undesirable.

If you wish to root cuttings in containers instead, a 1:1 mixture of peat and perlite or peat and builder's sand is an excellent mixture. Both of these mixtures provide moisture, drainage, and aeration necessary for rooting.

You may wish to try a rooting hormone, available at many garden centers, to stimulate better rooting. However, results from the use of rooting hormones are variable. Treatment with hormones is not a substitute for good propagation procedures and will not ensure rooting if other factors are limiting.

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