

Growing Plants From Softwood Cuttings

1) I use a growing medium of 80%-85% finely ground pinebark and 15% river sand...place it on a sheet of plastic in the sun...mix it well...water it and turn it several times over a period of several days. After each turning it should be covered with clear plastic sheeting. The sun will heat the mixture and "Pasteurize" it. The mixture should be evenly moist(not soggy) when it is used. I have mixed in peat moss in previous years, but stopped because it holds too much moisture. I have also seen cuttings rooted in straight sand and it worked well. Many club members use the leaf mold supplied to us by the city, which also works well.

2)Pot size is a matter of choice. I use 2" pots which fit 32 pots to a webbed flat. If I overwinter my plants in these pots, they are pretty well rootbound in the spring so I have to massage the roots open a little when I move them up into larger pots.

3)I use several chemicals which may or may not be necessary depending on the types of plants being rooted. Benomyl is a fungicide used as a soil drench immediately after the cuttings are stuck(within a day-or-two). It helps prevent damping off, and can be used every 4-6 weeks. I always drench Rhododendron! I usually use Rootone(a rooting hormone) to encourage rooting. Another product named Root-N-Grow is a liquid dip rooting hormone which reportedly works very well. Easy to root plants like azalea, forsythia, and butterfly bushes root easily(albeit not as quickly)without using hormone or soil drench.

4)Before taking your cuttings fill your pots with your mix making sure the mixture is full to the top of your pot and firmed in. I use a pencil to poke a hole for the cutting so the Rootone doesn't get scraped off when inserting the cutting.

5)Most plants root well from cuttings taken from June through August or even later. Cuttings should be taken as early in the morning as possible, and try to handle the cuttings in the shade while sticking them. The cutting should feel firm when you bend it but not break. If it does not feel firm, wait a few weeks until they do firm up. Do not cut into brown stem growth. Cuttings taken early in the summer will often have very tender growth on the ends(terminal bud). If this is the case, take a long enough cutting so that you can snip off the tender ends and still have a cutting suitable for rooting. The tender ends would shrivel up and reduce the chances of rooting if left on the cutting.

6)Okay, its early in the morning, your pots are filled with soil mixture and holes poked in the mix with a pencil. Your Rooting hormone and pots are in the shade just waiting for you to stick the cuttings. Now what? I use scissors to snip off my cuttings from the branch, and generally take a 4"-6" section of branch from the parent plant. Sometimes you can take a longer section off and cut it into several 4"-6" lengths suitable for rooting. Since my flats hold 32 pots, I take 32 cuttings and go to my work table. I strip off all the bottom leaves and usually snip off the terminal bud(this encourages branching when the rooted cuttings start to put off new growth). If the plant being propagated is a large leaved plant such as Rhododendron or Hydrangea, I will leave two leaves on the cutting and then snip off 1/2 to 2/3's of those two leaves left. I then look for a growth node at the base of the cutting. I strip off the node and the skin below the node all the way to the bottom of the cutting. Don't go too deep...all you want to do is expose the cambium layer. Dip the cutting into your rooting hormone, tap off the excess, and then stick it

Growing Plants From Softwood Cuttings

into the pre-poked hole. Firm the soil around your cutting with your fingers, then repeat this process until all your pots have been stuck. Water them in gently (you can use your Benomyl drench at this time if you so choose) and place them into your rooting box.

7) Rooting boxes can take many forms. I have a 15'x48' greenhouse with a mist system that works very well (I average 80%+ success rate, 95%+ on azaleas). However a clear plastic dome on top of a flat will also work. Many people use a wooden box large enough to handle 200+ cuttings completely covered with clear plastic. The box must be placed in the shade. If the sun hits it in mid-summer, temperatures inside will reach 140 degrees or higher and fry everything inside. The main thing is to keep the cuttings in a moist environment. They will need an occasional drink of water, but be careful not to overwater. Too much water is the death knell of rooted cuttings. Check the cuttings in about 6 weeks and you should be able to see some roots. If not, cover the box back up and check them again in two week increments until you think they have all rooted. Take the cover off your plants at this time and begin feeding them with a water soluble fertilizer at half strength every two weeks.

8) Overwintering your rooted cuttings is not usually a problem. When frosty weather hits simply cover them back up in the box with plastic. They will continue to grow roots as the winter progresses and do not require much water during this period. WARNING...Overwatering during the winter months is also a killer. Note; rooted Hydrangea cuttings are particularly susceptible to cold temperatures and will need special care when temperatures drop below 20 degrees.

9) It is now early April and your rooted cuttings are screaming to be moved up to larger pots. I use one gallon pots for plants to be set out in the fall, or two or three gallon pots if I want to grow them an extra year. Use the same potting mix you used for propagation and fill their new homes half full. Take the rooted cutting from its pot and check the roots. If they are tightly rootbound, gently loosen them up until they are out of a tight ball. If you do not do this they will not spread out. Place the plant in the larger pot and backfill around it. The soil will settle an inch or two so take that into account as you fill the pot. Spread Osmocote at the rate of 1/2 tablespoon per one gallon pot and one tablespoon per two or three gallon pot. Sun loving plants should be placed in the sun and watered regularly (you can tell when they need water). Shade loving plants do well in morning sun.

Plants I have rooted in this manner include;

Azalea
Rhododendron
Holly
Japanese Barberry
Forsythia
Hydrangea
Butterfly Bush
Kerria
Viburnum

Roses
Pittosporum
Weigela
Oleander
Cotoneaster
Smoke Tree
St. John'swort
Mountain Laurel

Crape Myrtle
Abelia
Leyland Cypress
Scotch Broom
English Laurel
Elaeagnus
Winter Jasmine
Cleyera