



Plant Propagation

Propagating your own plants is a much cheaper way of getting plants for the garden than buying “ready-made” plants from a garden centre. It is much more satisfying too, watching new life emerge from seeds or apparently bare roots come to life! There are many detailed descriptions in websites and videos on-line. These simple stages will get you started and dispel some of the myths around. Have fun!

- **Seed sowing Indoors**

This is a great way to get a head start with tender plants especially the further north you are with the cold and shorter growing season to contend with. Once the ground has warmed up and the days are longer, usually not before the beginning of May, they can go into the ground.

Most of the vegetables we are able to grow in Britain can be started off this way. For some it is because they are tender like peas and beans but with others like celeriac it is because they take longer to grow and so benefit from the early start.

If you are lucky enough to have a heated greenhouse or very wide window sills at home you can get started in January, otherwise it is usually better to leave it to February/March time for planting out in May and June.

- **Seed sowing outdoors**

If you are short of indoor space, many vegetables and herbaceous plants can be sown directly into the ground, usually from May onwards and seed packets provide information on when they can be sown. Again bearing in mind that the advice does not distinguish between Dover and Dungeness!

Beans, carrots, onions and peas can cope with being sown outdoors but you need to keep an eye on the weather forecast as there can still be frosts in late spring. Keep the cloches and fleece on hand until well into May.

- **Taking cuttings**

There are more ways than seed sowing to bring on new plants and the great thing about taking cuttings is that it is plants for free! What is especially good is when you take cuttings from a fruit bush that you love as you can easily make more of them. In fact, once you have bought fruit bushes like gooseberry and red, white and blackcurrants you won't ever have to buy any more. You'll probably have so many that will be giving them away.

There are many plants and shrubs that you can taking cuttings from, all you need are the right tools (sharp knife and secateurs).

- **Hardwood Cuttings** (eg gooseberries, black, red and white currants)

A good time to do this is when you are pruning the plant at the end of the growing season (autumn)

- Select vigorous healthy shoots that have grown in the current year
- Take a section between 6 inches and 1ft long
- Cut straight across at the base below a bud or pair of buds
- Prepare a trench in a sheltered site with well-drained soil. Preferably dig in a bucketful of garden compost
- Put the cuttings into the ground with two-thirds of the cutting below the surface. The roots will form along the stem. A few buds remain above the ground to allow the plant to grow away in spring.
- Allow 10-15cm (4-6in) between cuttings and 40cm (16in) between trenches
- Cuttings should be left in place over winter and the following summer before moving to the final site in the autumn.
- Cuttings can be put into pots or containers rather than in the ground.

- **Softwood Cuttings** (eg buddleia, lavender, fuschia)

Unlike hardwood cuttings, most softwood cuttings are taken in spring and early summer, from the tender new season growth. They are best brought on in pots rather than planted outside

- Remove a shoot, no more than 10cm long, just above a leaf on the parent plant
- Remove the leaves from the bottom half of the cutting
- Cut the tops off the remaining leaves (about halfway down each leaf)
- Put cuttings into pots of moist compost, keeping lower leaves just above compost level
- Cover the pot with a clear polythene bag held in place with an elastic band.
- Place in a warm spot, out of direct sun, to root.

With all cuttings you may wish to dip the exposed cut into rooting powder before planting as this encourages root growth.

Many cuttings will root in water as well as soil. Simply put the cutting into a jar of water, wait for roots to appear and then plant into pots, transferring to the soil once growth is vigorous.

- **Layering**

Simple layering is an easy way to propagate. Layered shoots are encouraged to root while still attached to the main plant. This technique is especially good for climbers and can be used on raspberry and blackberry bushes too. Some plants do it naturally like ivy so this technique uses this tendency to produce new plants.

- Choose a flexible branch, one near the ground
- Remove the leaves except for the ones at the very tip
- Bend the branch so that it is in contact with the soil and make a small nick in the stem where it touches
- Make a small hole in the soil immediately underneath the branch and bury the nicked part
- Peg/weigh the branch down so that it doesn't shoot up
- Cover with compost and wait

- Once the stem has rooted it can be cut from the parent plant and moved to a new site

Strawberry plants are easily propagated from their runners by layering. Simply peg down the runner, leaving leaves at the growing tip. Roots will soon form at the pegged runner and the new plant can be removed from the parent.

- **Splitting plants**

Dividing some perennials will help to keep them healthy and it means more plants for free. In fact most perennial plants will benefit from being split every two or three years. Most can be divided successfully at any time but probably best to wait until they have stopped flowering. With some once divided you can see that they have already started to produce individual plantlets which can be re-planted. More for free!

- Dig up the root ball while the plant is dormant (no leaf growth) or after flowering
- Wash off some of the soil so that you can see the roots clearly
- Split the ball into smaller clumps, making sure that each clump has a new growing shoot at the top
- Pot each clump into a new pot/space in the garden