

## Propagation of Hardy Shrubs from Softwood Cuttings

Softwood cuttings (sometimes called semi-hardwood cuttings) are taken from new growth when it snaps when broken, rather than crushes (too immature) or bends (too mature). Take cuttings two weeks apart if unsure.

Soil for rooting should be well-drained and not rich in organic matter. There should be plenty of light, but not too much direct sunlight.

Good candidates for mid-summer cutting success include heather, hydrangea, mock orange, shrubby potentilla, deciduous viburnum, weigela, and evergreen azaleas and small-leaved rhododendrons.

**Take cuttings** from vigorous, insect- and disease-free plants in the morning when they have maximum internal moisture and keep cool and moist until ready to place in the cuttings bed. (Note: It is illegal to propagate patented plants from cuttings, even for your own use.)

### Prepare Cuttings

Stem or Nodal Cuttings: Cuttings root from leaf nodes on many plants. Prepare cuttings with at least one node at top and bottom by stripping lower leaves and pinching out the growth tip.

Heel Cuttings (Heathers and Coniferous shrubs): Strip off side shoots with a heel from a main stem of the plant. Pinch out the growth tip, but leave all other growth on the cutting to promote bushier growth.

Evergreen Azaleas and Small-leaved Rhododendron Cuttings: Select new growth with a leaf bud (rather than a flower bud). Remove lower leaves and take a thin sliver of bark from opposite sides at the base of the cutting.



Stem or Nodal Cuttings of Hydrangea  
and Fuchsia



Heather Heel Cutting



Rhododendron and Azalea Cuttings

**Plant cuttings** with a dibble or in a small trench to avoid damage by stabbing them into the soil. Keep the soil moist.

**Move the new plant** to a pot (or nursery bed) after some roots have formed. A bit of new growth may (but not always) be a sign that roots are beginning to form. Check by carefully lifting the cutting with a spoon. Depending on the particular plant, it will take one to several years to grow after potting to a size to plant in the garden.

### **Tips for success**

- Don't pot up too soon. Make sure roots are well developed. All cuttings of the same type and the same time taken may not all be ready at the same time.
- Pot into the smallest container needed to hold the roots. Move to a larger container when ready.
- Saturate the soil of the newly-potted plant immediately.
- Don't pot up late in the season. New plants need time to grow and get established before onset of winter. Otherwise, leave in the cutting bed over winter.
- Don't move newly-potted plants into a new environment right away.

### References:

Cuttings Through the Year, Arboretum Foundation, available at [www.arboretumfoundation.org](http://www.arboretumfoundation.org). This booklet lists the plants and cutting type with likely success by month for the Puget Sound region. ISBN 0-9636182-1-0

Plant Propagation, The American Horticultural Society, Alan Toogood, Editor-in-Chief, DK Publishing, 199. ISBN978-0-7894-4116-4

The Reference Manual of Woody Plant Propagation, Second Edition, Michael A. Dirr and Charles W. Heuser, Jr., Timber Press, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-1-60469-004-0