



Stem Cuttings Jump-Start Your Garden

And they can be grown at no cost!

by Patty Ferguson, Yakima County Master Gardener

A glass, clean water, and some potting soil are all it takes in materials to start your garden from new growth cuttings..

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on the Yakima
County Master
Gardeners
Program:**

[https://
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Not all plants need to be grown from seed. Growing new plants from cuttings of existing plants is another way to fill your garden with lush flowers, herbs, and many other plants—without spending any money.

However, using cuttings won't work with all plants. Some that can be grown from cuttings include Rosemary, Mint, Basil, Tomatoes, Roses, English Ivy, Aster, Butterfly Bush, Chrysanthemum, Hydrangea, Salvia, Dahlia, Gardenia, red and yellow Dogwood, Clematis, Sweet Potato, and Fuchsia. Check online to confirm that the plant you wish to propagate can be grown from cuttings.

It's always best to use a young stem. Look for a healthy, disease-free branch from the top of the plant. Use sharp, sanitized pruners or scissors (sprayed with a mix of 10% bleach, 90% water) and cut off the branch at its base.

Each cutting should be approximately four- to six-inches long. Locate a stem that has at least two nodes below the tip leaves. A node is the spot on the stem where a leaf is, or was, attached. The node looks like a joint on the stem, and it's the area that will generate new roots. Make a clean cut, just below the bottom node. Remove all but one or two leaves. The cutting needs some leaf growth to continue photosynthesis, since it can't take in any food from roots it doesn't yet have. But, too many leaves will sap energy from the plant's efforts to create new roots. If the leaves are large, you can cut them in half.

The next step is to decide whether to grow your cutting in water or soil, either method will work.

Growing Cuttings in Water

Place the end of the cutting into a cup or glass of water for up to two weeks. Do not leave them in direct sunlight. Change the water every other day, keeping the water over the nodes where you want roots to grow. The cuttings need the oxygen in the fresh water.

Keep leaves out of the water. A nylon or wire mesh (such as chicken wire) stretched over the glass can aid with this, but is not necessary. New roots should start to grow out of the node along the bottom part of your cutting.

After roots develop, take your plant out of the water and place the rooted stem into well-ventilated, seed-starting soil, which is available at most nurseries.

Using the Soil Method

Always use seed-starting soil. Plan to bury at least two nodes in the soil. Dip the end of the cutting into water, then (optionally) into root hormone. The water helps the hormone stick to the stem. Purchase a gel or powder root hormone from a gardening store or online. Using the hormone may speed up growth, however, many gardeners root their cuttings without it. Never breathe in the hormone powder.

Next, push a pencil into soil to create a hole deep enough for your cutting, then place the bottom half of the cutting into the soil. Firmly, but gently, press soil around the stem. Make sure the soil is completely moist but not over saturated. Never let soil completely dry out.

A light sprinkle or spray every day is best. Keep the cutting in a bright area, but away from direct sunlight. Cover container with a plastic bag or clear plastic lid. The plastic covering will keep the humidity high and hold in heat. However, don't seal completely, because some air flow is necessary to prevent fungal rot.

In two to three weeks, roots should have formed on the underground nodes. Using a fork, carefully lift the plant and look under the cutting to see if roots have started growing. If

they have not developed, you'll need to restart the process with another cutting.

Once roots have grown out of the cutting, it's ready to be moved to a permanent growing location. Happy Gardening!

