

Clone your plants

Among the many exciting things about plants that make them so popular, is how easy it is to multiply them. Is there anyone who has not taken a “cutting” at some point, placed it in a glass of water, and put the resulting rooted plant in soil? While they might not always be completely amenable to our wishes, and some are very fussy in terms of their soil and water requirements, plants are usually very agreeable when it comes to creating offspring. Yet, these are not actually offspring. New plants generated this way are actually “clones” – identical both to the plants that were the sources of the cuttings and identical to each other.

Different varieties and cultivars have different requirements for successful propagation.

A common way plants are shared is by simply pinching off a stem with several leaves from a rapidly growing area of the plant. Called “stem cutting,” this is effective for smaller plants without woody tissue. Avoid stems with flowers; they frequently do not root. A cutting left sitting for a very long time in water will frequently produce a mass of roots, but when finally planted in soil, it is often slow to become established. This is because it must create a new set of roots, ones that are more adapted to getting moisture and nutrients from the soil. Stem cutting, however, is only one of many ways to create a new plant from an old one.



Sanseveria, Snake Plant

Plants like sanseveria, also known “snake plant” or “mother in law’s tongue” can be propagated easily using a “leaf cutting”. Here, a long, spear-like leaf is cut into several sections, each two to three inches long. These chunks are dipped into rooting powder and planted standing up with the base about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inches below the surface of a well-drained, fertile soil. Most of the section is above ground. Each chunk will produce several small plants growing from the base. When using this method, the most important factor to remember is to keep the chunks upright, oriented in the same direction that they were originally growing. If they get disoriented, there will be no new plants.

New African violets can also be generated from a single whole leaf placed upright into a moist rich soil.

Most of the leaf should be above the surface, with only $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of the leaf buried. A single leaf can produce a half dozen or more young plants. Curiously, these new plants will generally appear on the side of the leaf that is sheltered from bright light.

Always keep the soil moist, not wet, with leaf cuttings.

Even woody plants can be propagated, using a technique called “air layering”. This requires a gentle incision into a portion of a young branch, dusting the incision with rooting powder, and keeping the incision in a moist wrapping until the plant produces roots at the incision site.

Any decent houseplant book will have pictures and descriptions of these techniques, which help broaden the palette of new plants inexpensively. Visit www.unce.unr.edu/publications, *Methods for Propagating Houseplants*, FS-01-86.

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