10 BEST PROPAGATION TIPS

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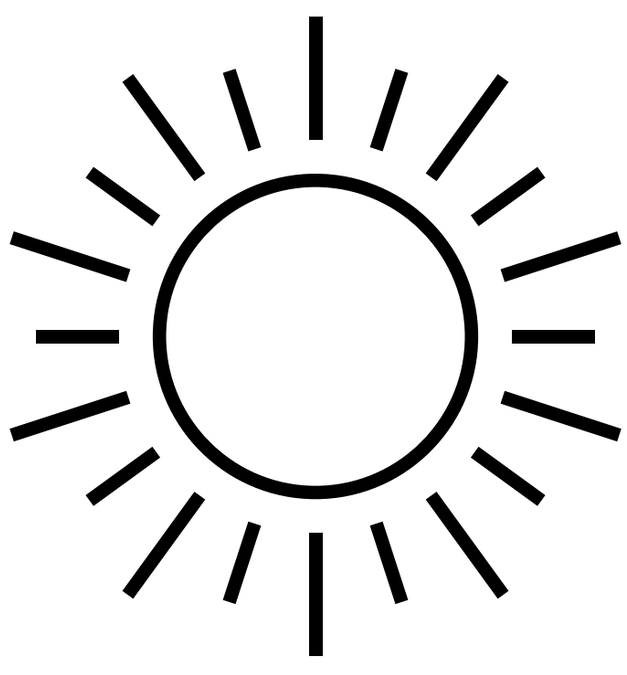
1. WHEN TO PROPAGATE

Let' kick this off by talking about when it is best to propagate your beloved houseplants as the right season can make all the difference between success and failure.

Spring to early summer is considered to be the best season to propagate plants. This is when plants are actively growing. Sunlight and warmth are important for plant growth and increase the chances of successfully propagating plants considerably.

This doesn't mean that you can't propagate plants in late summer, autumn or even winter. This is definitely possible but expect cuttings to take much longer to root and chances of success to be slimmer.

THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF LIGHT IS CRITICAL FOR SUCCESSFUL PROPAGATION



2. WHAT TO PROPAGATE

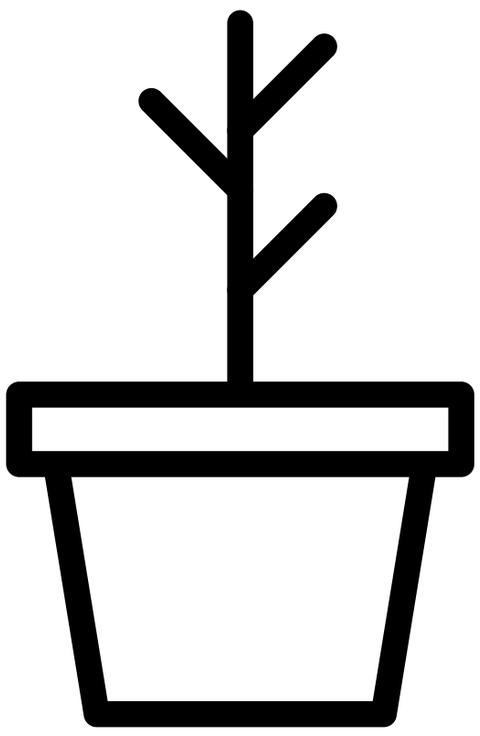
There are different methods that lead to success when propagating plants. It is important to know for each plant which methods are available and will lead to a new plant. Most if not all houseplants can be propagated by stem cuttings. Succulents and some other plants can even be propagated from leaf cuttings.

It is important to note here that propagation by leaf cuttings is not successful for the majority of houseplants. Eg. a Monstera Deliciosa will never be successfully propagated from a leaf cutting. You will at least need a stem with a node.

A variant of a stem cuttings is if you are cutting the petiole with the stem. A petiole is a shoot where a new leaf is forming.

In addition some plants such as Sansevieria can be propagated by just sections of leaves.

Last but not least there are plants such as figs and roses where you can take root cuttings and produce a new plant.



3. HOW TO DO A CUTTING

For most propagation methods you will need either a sharp scissors or knife. We want to stress the sharpness as you are looking for a clean cut for the wound to heal well and fast,

Make sure that your tool of choice is disinfected as you do not want to spread pathogens from one plant to the rest of your collection.

We are using 2 things to make sure our scissors are disinfected. Step one is to use rubbing alcohol that you can apply on the blade. The second step is holding the blade of you knife or scissors into a flame for a few seconds. This way you can ensure that everything is completely clean.

Once you have done these steps, it is important to think about where to do the cut:

Stem cuttings: Make sure to end up with at least 3-5 leaves. The bottom 1-2 leaves can be removed so you have sufficient stem area than you can place into the medium of choice. We will come to that.

Leaf cuttings: Cacti and Succulents are propagated using leaves and shoots as they mostly don't have stems.

There are different methods of taking leaf cuttings. You can take whole leaves, leaf sections or leaves with shoots.

Root cuttings: For root cuttings take larger sections of roots and cut them into 2-3 inches (5-8 centimetres).

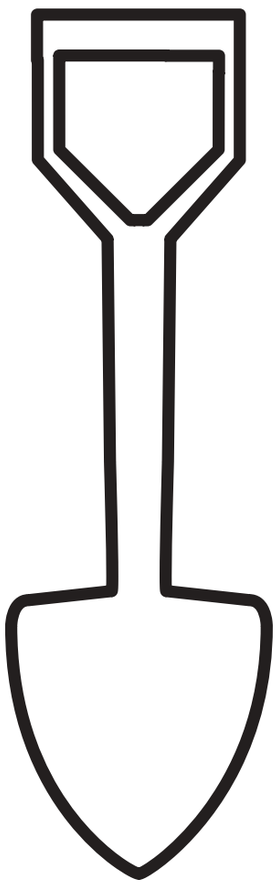
Root cutting are usually taken in winter so the new shoots can sprout in spring.

4. THE RIGHT MEDIUM

You have now taken a cutting using one of the suggested methods for your plant of choice. The next step is to choose the right medium to propagate your cutting. The goal for it is to produce roots and new leaves. There are several methods and it mostly comes down to your preferences.

Rooting in Water: One of the most common methods is to root cuttings in water. The biggest advantage is that if you place your cuttings into a transparent glass or bowl you can observe if the cutting starts rooting. The downside is that the plants produce water roots that need to transform into soil roots. This process can stress out plants when transferring to soil.

Rooting in Sphagnum Moss: This method is a bit less common simply due to the fact that most people won't have sphagnum moss readily available at home. From our point of view it is the best method for most plants. What you need to be careful with is that the moss is not too wet.



No matter if you are using fresh sphagnum moss or a dried up version, you will need to soak it in water and press out the water multiple times before you put your cutting into the moss. This way you are ensuring that the moss is slightly most but not soaking wet as this could lead to a rotting cutting.

Rooting in Soil: Most plants can be rooted directly in or on soil. We say on soil as eg. succulents can be placed onto slightly most soil and will start growing roots towards the soil. Cuttings can also be placed directly into soil. An example would be a Monstera Adansonii that you could stick into soil directly after cutting it off the mother plant. The main benefit is that you are basically skipping a step between rooting in a different medium and then placing the cutting into soil. Plants can be stressed by the transfer.

5. WHERE TO PROPAGATE

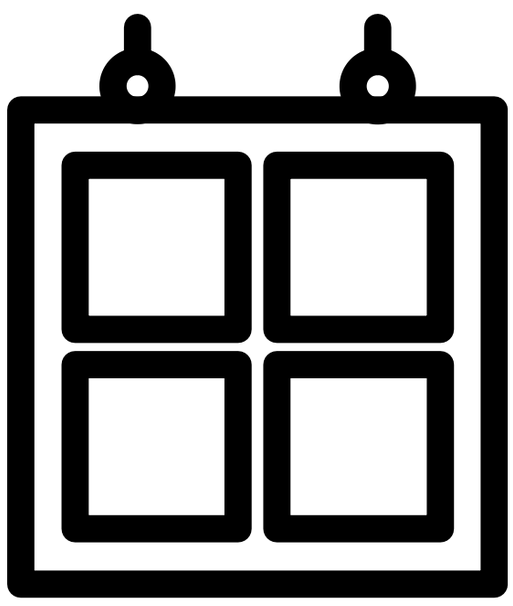
Once you have put your cutting into water, sphagnum moss or soil your next step is to choose a suitable spot for your soon to be plant. Depending on plant species, cutting can take days, weeks or even multiple months to develop sufficient roots to be placed into soil.

It is therefore critical that you choose a space where you feel comfortable of having a cutting for several weeks in most cases.

Did you know that where you place your cutting will have a significant impact on how long the whole process will take? Yes that is true. The right amount of light, warmth and humidity are essential.

A common mistake is to put your cuttings into a dark corner. Cuttings need often bright but indirect light. Equally so putting a cutting into a window with full sun might kill it.

So where should you put your cuttings? A good place is close to a window with bright indirect light, Depending on the season and the climate zone you are living in, you will also have to take into account that being close to a window means colder temperatures.

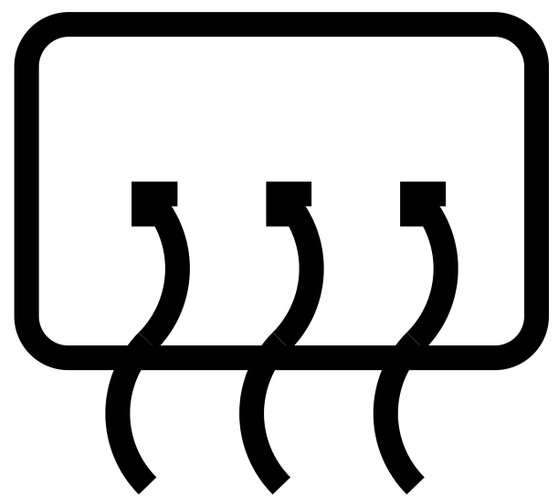


6. PROPAGATION HELPERS

The importance of the right temperature cannot be underestimated. When we first started to propagate plants we didn't pay so much attention to it. However once we did, it made all the difference.

It is best to have heat coming from below. This will help cuttings to produce roots quickly. The best propagation enhancer is by far a heat mat.

There are many different brands of heat mats available. A seedling heat mat will do the job just fine. Leave it on 24/7 or turn it off at night to simulate natural conditions. You will see that this will speed up the process tremendously.



Apart from the heat, cuttings will need humidity during the propagation process. It is interesting that this statement is true for succulents as well. Generally that is not the type of plants you would consider to be humidity hungry. But in order to develop roots and grow into full plants, the right level of humidity is essential, even for succulents.

Apart from a heat mat, a second game changer is a plastic tub or container with a lid. This is the easiest way to keep an optimal level of humidity around your cuttings. You can spray water with a spraying bottle initially when you place your cuttings into the container. You can then repeat the process every couple of days depending on if you keep your container fully closed or if you have holes and openings for air circulation. The tubs and containers will create some sort of a microclimate where you can see that water will evaporate and rain down on your cutting again.

The trick is to find the right balance of water in the tubs so it stays moist but will not soak or even worse, rot the cuttings by producing fungus.

7. AIR LAYERING

A slightly more advanced version of propagating plants is air layering. This is a method that tries to grow roots when the cutting is still on the plant itself to put it into simple terms.

This method can be user for plants with stems. Good examples are Philodendron or Monstera plants as well as rubber plants with their wooden stems.

When air layering your first need to cut slightly into the stem of the plant you want to air layer with at a distance of about an inch. Once the two cuts are made you can slightly remove the bark, assuming you are doing this on a houseplant with a woody stem such as the rubber plant. The area where you removed the wooden stem will be where you expect the roots to grow.

In the case of Monstera and Philodendron plants it is often possible to air layer without cutting into the stem as you can air layer where the plants have nodes and air roots.

Identify an area suitable for air layering that is at least 2ft (60cm) from the tip of your plant. Always look out for nodes and air roots when air layering a Philodendron or Monstera,

The next task is to use a plastic bag or plastic foil that you can wrap around the stem containing a rooting medium. The most common is sphagnum moss.

Fixate the moss with a plastic bag or foil around the cut stem or node / air roots. The bag will work like a greenhouse and the roots will start to grow into the rooting medium. Once sufficient roots have formed you can remove the air layering and cut off the top section below the roots.

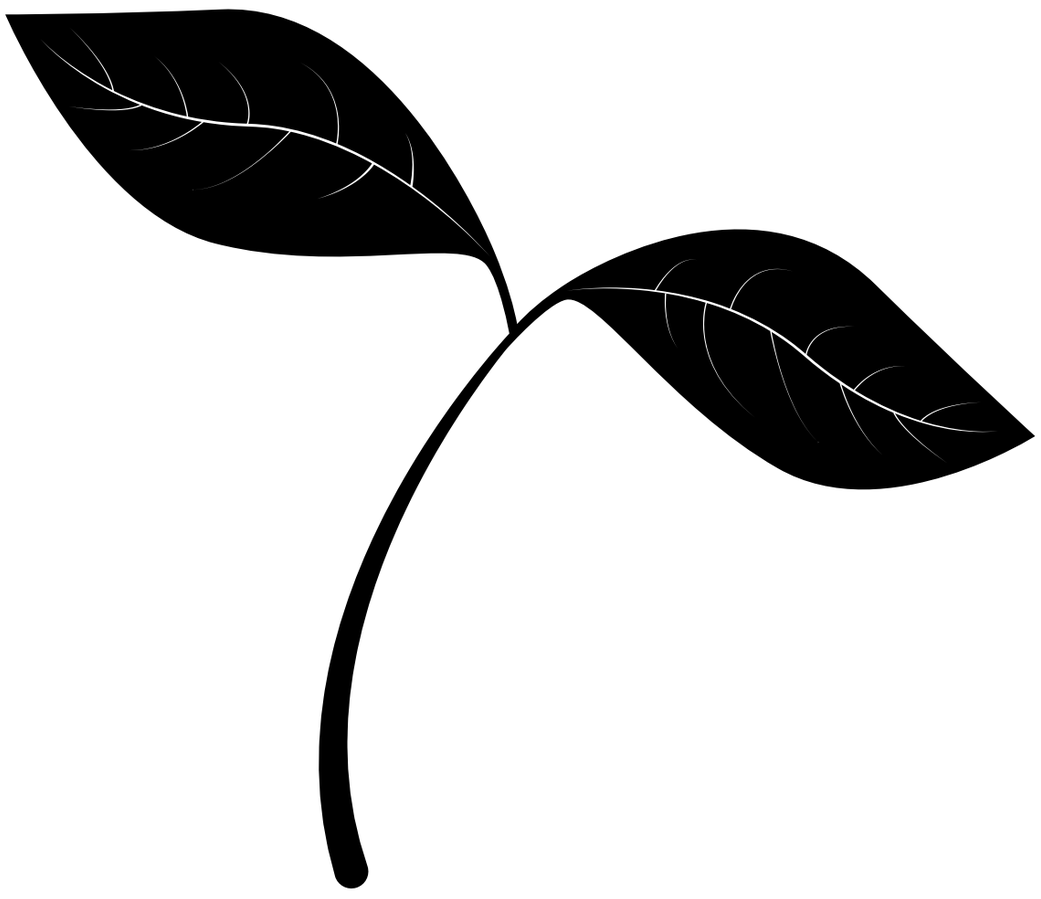
The main advantage of air layering is that you reduce the risk of failure as your cutting is given the chance to produce roots when still on the mother plant.

8. SEED PROPAGATION

Seed propagation is by far the trickiest method, The main advantage is that you can propagate large amounts of plants at once. On the other hand it is the most time consuming approach for propagating plants as it takes time for plants to sprout. Furthermore seedlings often develop slowly.

In addition some plants such as the Monstera Deliciosa has seeds that are only viable for a limited amount of time, If not sown with this limited timeframe, they will not germinate anymore.

Futhermore if you are growing variegated plants, variegation is often not handed on to seeds.



Don't buy seeds off the internet unless your source is impeccable

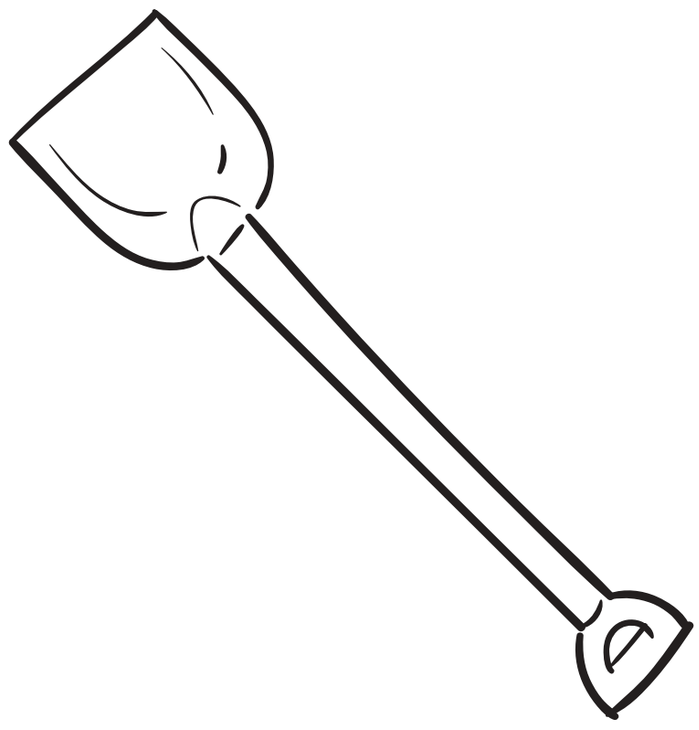
If you are still interested in growing from seed read on. Place your seeds in soil and make sure to allow sufficient distance between seeds. It is best to put the seeds in some sort of plastic container that you can close with a lid. Water the soil slightly and cover the container with a lid. Warmth is critical. Make therefore sure that the temperature is kept between 60 - 75°F (15 - 23°C).

As long as the seeds are not germinated very little light is needed. Once they sprout and you see the first leaves, you can put the container into light indirect light. When the seedlings reach the lid you can remove it. But be careful to slightly adiust your seedlings to the new environment and remove the lid more and more over the course of a few days.

9. PROPAGATION BY DIVISION

Propagation by division is a simple method for plant that produce rhizomes, stolons, bulbs and tubers. Some examples of plants that can be propagated by division are peace lilies and ZZ plants,

To propagate by division, you need to dig up the plant you want to propagate. Use tools such as spades or secateurs for the division. Put the section you divided into a different pot with its own growing medium such as soil and add in some slow release fertilizer.



Keep the divided section out of direct sunlight until it started to grow new leaves. The production of new leaves is a good indicator that sufficient roots have grown and the plant is not investing energy into growing leaves again. Once this is the case, put your divided plant in the same location you would put a fully grown plant of the same type. Continue to water normally.

That's basically it. We told you that it is simple.

10. FINAL WORDS

There is nothing more fulfilling than getting more of something you love. The best thing about propagation is that it is almost free to free, if you are not counting the costs for scissors, water and additional growing helpers and mediums.

A further benefit is that you can either share or sell your propagated plants to others. When selling you might get close to the price you paid for your initial plant depending on the plant we are looking at.

But let us say this, not every attempt will be successful. It might be hard on you from time to time but a healthy propagated plant will make up for anything,

For us, the pleasure of propagating our own plants and seeing them grow is among the best feelings in the world.

Happy propagation!

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