COTTONWOOD URBAN FARM

Grow More Plants for Free!

Propagation by Cuttings

A cutting is a piece of stem, leaf or root that grows its own roots and becomes a brand-new plant. It's a **clone**: the new plant has all of its parent's great traits (and its quirks too!). Most shrubs, trees, herbs and many perennials can be grown this way.

Pick your cutting type

Herbaceous — 3–4 in

Soft, non-woody plants. Take any time during the growing season. *Try: basil, mint, coleus.*

Softwood — up to 3 in

Tender new tips on woody plants, spring to early summer. Roots fast but wilts easily.

Semi–hardwood — 4–6 in

New growth that's starting to firm up, late summer to fall. Easiest for home growers! *Try: rosemary, sage.*

Hardwood — 6–12 in

Dormant wood, late fall to winter. Can root right outdoors. *Try: mulberry, fig, grape.*

Gather your gear

- Sharp, clean pruners or scissors
- Pots or trays with drainage
- Rooting mix (see right)
- Rooting hormone powder or gel
- Pencil or dibber for poking holes
- Labels and a marker
- Clear bag or humidity dome
- Spray mister

Clean everything first! Dirty tools and pots spread disease.

Mix it up!

Great rooting mix drains fast, holds moisture and is clean. Mix any pair **50/50**:

- Perlite + peat moss
- Perlite + vermiculite
- Sharp sand + peat moss
- Bark-based potting mix + perlite

Skip garden soil and compost (disease) and beach sand (salt).

Let's make a cutting!

1. **Pick a healthy parent.** Choose vigorous new growth with no flowers or buds. Water it about an hour before you snip.

2. **Snip when it's cool.** Morning or late afternoon is best. Keep cuttings in a damp paper towel inside a bag, out of the sun.

3. **Trim it up.** Cut just below a node (where a leaf meets the stem). Three or four nodes is plenty.

4. **Clear the bottom leaves.** Snip off leaves that would sit below the soil (they rot), then cut the rest in half to save water.

5. **Dip in rooting hormone.** Tap off the extra. A must for woody cuttings; often optional for soft ones in spring and summer.

6. **Stick it!** Poke a hole in damp mix with a pencil, slide the cutting in and firm gently.

7. **Label and cover.** Add the name and date, then cover with a clear bag or dome, leaving a little gap for air.

Baby care

- Bright, indirect light; no harsh sun, wind or rain
- Moist, never soggy; mist daily
- After a week, give a gentle tug. Resistance means roots!
- Pot up once roots are strong

Why tips root best

Growing tips make **auxins**, natural hormones that tell stems to grow roots. Rooting powder adds an extra boost.

Adapted from "Propagation by Stem Cuttings," Jim Fowler, UCCE Master Gardeners of Yolo County (UC ANR), and *Plant Propagation A to Z*, Geoff Bryant (Firefly Books, 2003).

Happy growing!
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