

Propagating houseplants from cuttings is probably the most common method of multiplying houseplants. Do this clipping in the spring. Almost any plant with trailing stems can be propagated from stem cuttings. Try coleus, wandering Jew, Swedish ivy, and the philodendrons for quick results.

Select a mature, healthy stem; use a sharp knife or blade to cut just below a leaf node (the place where a leaf grows from the stem). The cutting should be several inches long and have four to six healthy leaves. Remove leaves from the bottom of the piece so they won't be buried in the rooting medium; dip the cuttings in a rooting hormone, if you wish.

Many cuttings will root in plain water, but roots grown in water tend to be brittle and fragile; they often break off as you pot the plant. You'll have better luck using a soilless medium, such as perlite, vermiculite, sand, peat moss, or any mixture of these. Equal portions of perlite and peat moss make a good combination.

If you're rooting only two or three cuttings, a small clay pot works well. If you're rooting more, use a clear plastic shoe box or other larger flat, covered container.

Moisten the soil mixture and poke holes in it with a knife or pencil. Slip the cuttings in and gently firm soil around the stems. Mist lightly and cover with the lid or encase in a plastic bag and close tightly. This will help retain vital humidity and keep the leaves from wilting as the stems root. Place under fluorescent lights or in indirect light.

In several weeks, check to see whether the cuttings have rooted by giving each a gentle tug; if the cutting resists, it should be sufficiently rooted to pot. (There should be an inch or two of roots.) If the cutting isn't sufficiently rooted, just slip it back into the medium.

Woody-stemmed plants, such as the dieffenbachias and dracenas, can be propagated from pieces of stem. This is an especially good technique to use after you've air layered the plant. Simply take a sharp knife and cut the remaining stem into pieces several inches long. Lay pieces on their sides and barely cover with a moist, sandy soil mixture. In several weeks, new growth will sprout from the side of the stem. Remove and repot in a larger container when roots are sufficiently strong.

To root leaf cuttings, follow the same procedure. Take leaf cuttings of such plants as peperomia, hoyo, begonia, African violet, and many of the succulents. Simply cut off a mature, healthy leaf at the stem base with a sharp knife, and insert it in a moist rooting medium. The leaves of some of the succulents (such as sedum and *Crassula argentea*) will have to be partially buried in the medium. In several weeks, tiny leaves will push their way up through the soil. When leaves and stems are strong and healthy, sever plantlets from the parent leaf and pot up individually.

If you're rooting only one leaf, especially the woody-stemmed ones, you can put it in a small plastic bag filled with rooting medium. When the leaf has developed strong roots,

pot it and watch for baby leaves to emerge. When they do, remove and discard the old leaf.

Many leaf cuttings also will root in water. Simply cover a jar or cup of water with aluminum foil, poke holes in it, and insert one or more leaf cuttings.

With pickaback plants, use a combination of the stem cutting and runner processes. Choose a mature leaf that has a plantlet piggybacking atop. Pin the plantlet down into a small pot filled with loose soil (a mixture of equal parts packaged soil and sharp sand works well). Do not remove the leaf from the parent plant yet. In several weeks, the plantlet will have developed its own roots; then you can sever the runner and remove the parent leaf.

To root cuttings of sansevieria, cut a mature, healthy leaf into three-inch segments; place upright in growing medium so that half the section is buried. (Sections will not root if upside down.) In a couple of months, new shoots will form at the side. Remove when roots are sufficiently strong.

Rex begonias can be rooted by placing the whole leaf flat on the surface of a pot of soil (use the same mix as for pickaback described earlier). Pin it down and make cuts across the main veins with a sharp knife. New plants will develop at the slits. Pot when rooted, taking a good portion of leaf with each plantlet.