

## Taking Cuttings

### **Why Take Cuttings?**

If a plant you want more of has some unique feature that may not come true from seed, take cuttings. Plants grown from seed have some variation between them even if the seed comes from a single plant. Plants grown from cuttings are identical to the parent plant. For example, if you want more African violets and you don't mind what colour the flowers are you can sow seed. African violets usually have plain purple flowers. If you want more African violets with ruffled, purple and white flowers you take cuttings from a plant with those flowers because it is very unlikely that you will get a seedling with these flowers.

### **Equipment**

The only additional piece of equipment needed to take cuttings is a sharp knife for example a craft knife. Some people prefer scissors but these may crush the base of the cutting.

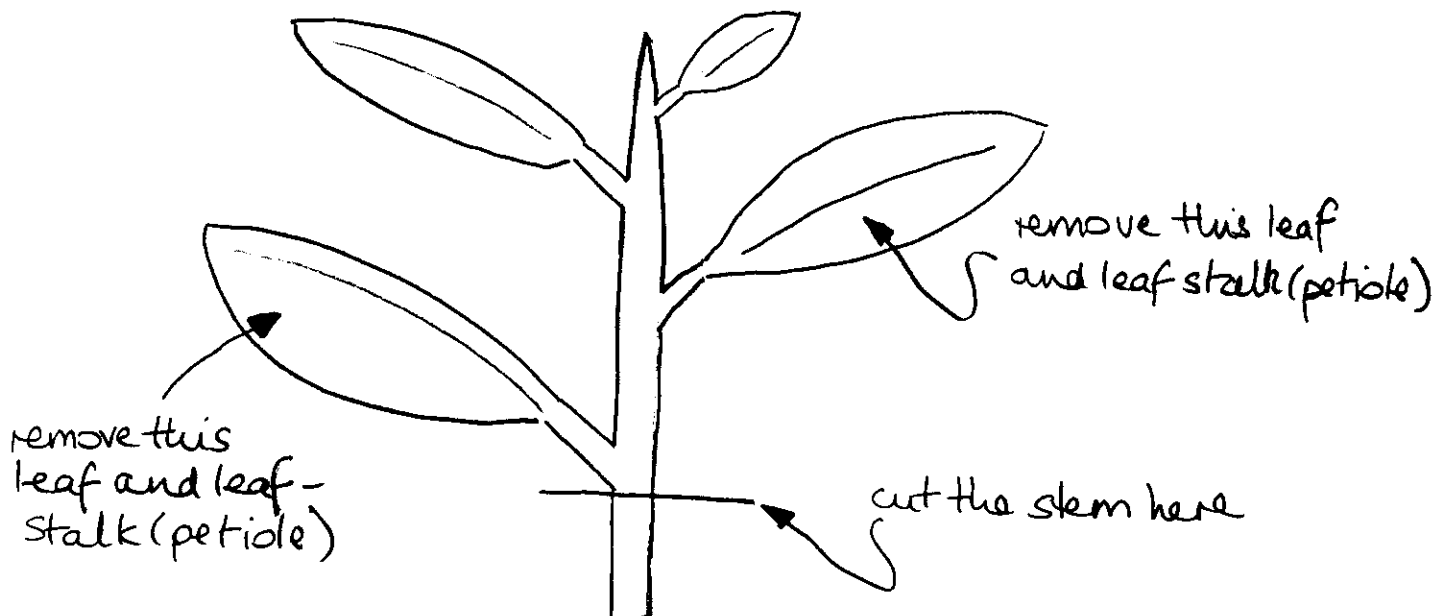
Hormone rooting powder is not necessary. Experiments on begonias, fuchsia and nemesia showed no difference between hormone rooting powder, icing sugar and nothing at all. Professional growers use hormones to encourage rooting but they tend to propagate more difficult species than the home gardener, such as rhododendrons. The rooting powder available to the home gardener contains more "filler" than that used by professionals and this filler can block the vascular system of the cutting making it harder for the cutting to root. Hormone powder also has a short shelf life and the hormones will degenerate if kept for more than one season.

### **Choosing Cutting Material**

Use the best plant material you can. Choose strong, healthy plants and use the best shoots for your cuttings. When taking cuttings make sure the parent plant is not cut back too hard or you can kill it. Take only the material you need and try to leave the parent plant looking balanced – don't take all your cuttings from one side.

### **Stem Cuttings**

This is the most common type of cutting. A shoot is removed from the parent plant and then trimmed, usually just below a leaf joint. The cutting should be about 3" (7-8 cm) long. Bigger is not better. Remove any flower buds.



The cutting is then inserted into compost and watered. If you cannot pot up your cuttings right away they will keep in a sealed plastic bag for a few hours. Cacti and succulent cuttings benefit from being left to dry for a few hours before potting up.

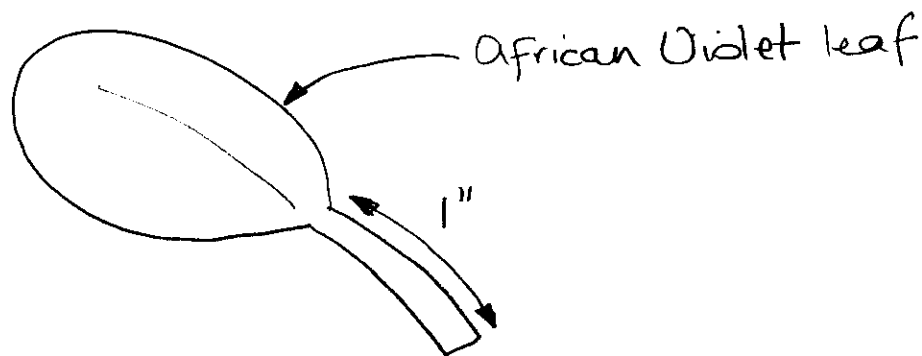
Most cuttings benefit from being kept in a humid atmosphere – cover the pot with a plastic bag to keep the cutting in good condition. Remove the bag when you see new growth on the cutting or if you see any signs of moulds. The common exceptions to this are geraniums (pelargoniums), peperomias, African violets, cacti and succulents.

Stem cuttings are used to propagate plants such as geraniums (pelargoniums) and tomatoes in the spring and also to propagate plants such as roses if cuttings are taken in July/August.

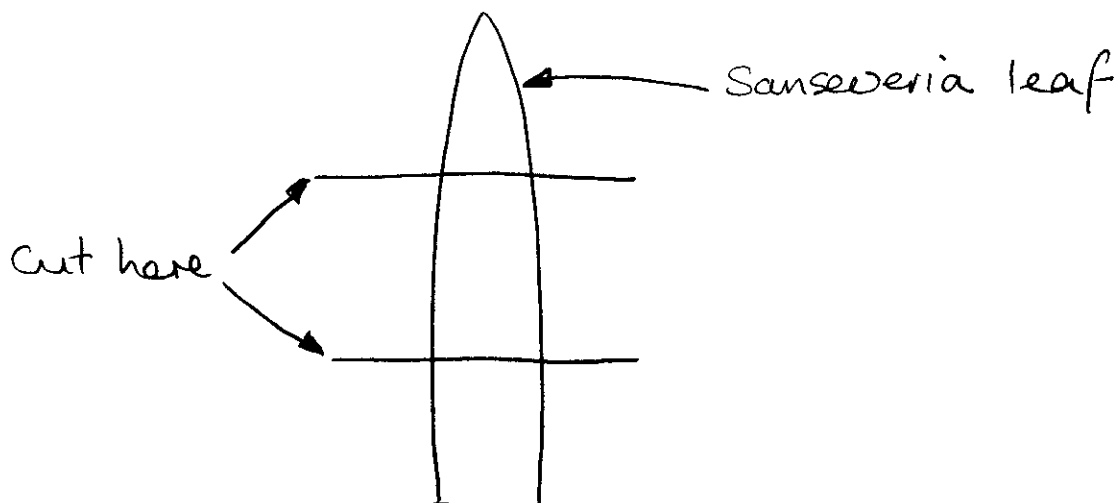
### Leaf Cuttings

Several species of plant can be grown from leaf cuttings, including African violets, peperomias and jade plants. There are several ways of taking leaf cuttings, depending on the plant being propagated.

For peperomias, begonias and African violets a healthy leaf is removed from the plant and the leaf stalk is trimmed to about 1" (2.5 cm). The leaf stalk is inserted into compost and watered. These leaves will also root if stood in clean water. Large begonia leaves can be cut into smaller sections and then treated in the same way as other leaf cuttings.



For Sanseveria (Mother-in-law's Tongue) the leaf is removed from the plant and cut into sections. Each section is inserted into compost (the right way up). These cuttings will give you all-green plants. If you have a variegated Sanseveria and want more plants with the same variation you need to divide the plant.



## **Other types Of Cuttings**

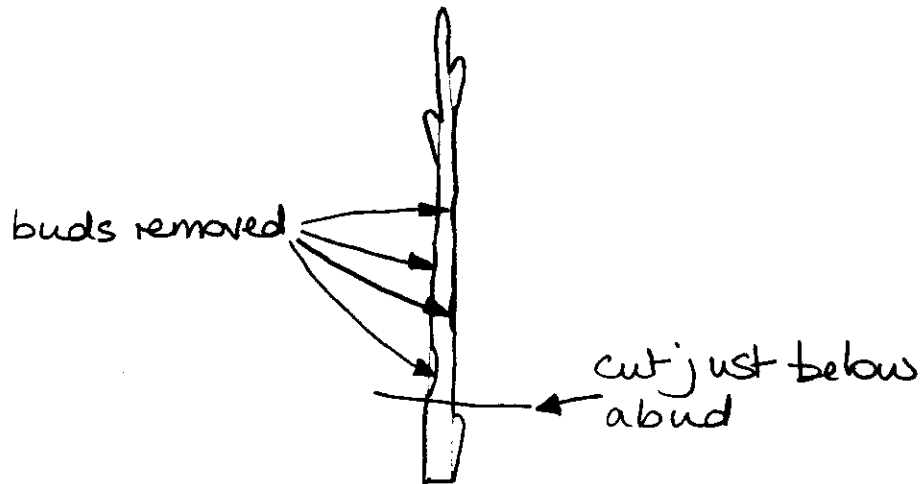
### Semi Hardwood Cuttings

These are the same as stem cuttings but the plant material is slightly older. These cuttings are usually taken in late July or August from plants such as roses.

### Hardwood Cuttings

Many trees and shrubs are propagated from cuttings taken in the dormant season (January and February). Such plants include non-suckering gooseberries, currants, willows and poplars. Cutting material should be about pencil thickness. Cuttings are usually between 9 and 18" long and are cut just below a bud. The bottom half of the cutting is stripped of buds and then inserted into soil/potting compost. Keep the cuttings in a cool, shady place and remember to water them when they start to grow. Leave them in place until the following autumn when they can be lifted and planted out elsewhere in the garden.

Apple trees will not grow from cuttings. They must be propagated either from seed or by grafting.



### **Cuttings Problems**

*Some of my cuttings died.*

Not all cuttings root. Expect to lose at least 1 in 5 for "easy" plants such as pelargoniums or coleus. Expect to lose more for more difficult plants.

*My cuttings have gone mouldy.*

Mould is fungal attack. If the cuttings are not dead you could try watering with a fungicide. Improving the ventilation will also help. Make sure you use clean pots, sterile potting compost and a clean knife when taking cuttings.