

Don't Clone Ugly or Patented Plants When Growing from Prunings

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Feb. 9, 2018

Q: I have been told that you can start new roses by taking a cutting from the prunings and sticking it in the ground. Is this true? Can you tell me how to do this?

A: Yes, you can start new plants from cuttings. What you are describing is the process of using hardwood cuttings to clone a plant. I always gain so much satisfaction from growing a new plant from a woody, dormant stick. Right now is the perfect time to begin propagating plants from hardwood cuttings while the plant is still dormant.



(Photo: Gabriele Ritz/EyeEm, Getty Images/EyeEm)

Propagating from hardwood cuttings is one of the easiest types of cloning as the cutting is usually impervious to damage due to the "mother" plant being dormant. Many woody plants can be successfully propagated this way. However, a little more care should be taken when selecting the stem that you plan to clone then taking prunings and sticking them into ground.

Start by selecting which bush you would like to take hardwood cuttings from, if it is a patented plant, many roses varieties are, I would discourage you from propagating it even for your own use as it is illegal to do so. Patented plants can be identified by a PP number (plant patent number) on the tag or the designation PPAF after its name (plant patent applied for).

You should also select healthy stems, larger than a pencil in diameter from a healthy, attractive plant. If the "mother" plant is ugly all the clones will be ugly.

To begin the process of cloning, start by gathering up the tools you will need. These include sharp pruning shears (a bypass pruner is best), a rooting hormone (this can be purchase at a local nursery), a clean pot, some growing media, and some way to label the pot. For the growing media, coarse sand works very well or a 50/50 mixture of perlite and potting soil. The potting soil should not have fertilizer added to it as this can inhibit root development.

There are some easily rooting plants that can be started by being stuck straight into garden soil, but this is not recommended as a general rule because soil pathogens could infect the cutting before it has time to root and it is harder to monitor the amount of moisture the cutting receives.

Choose stems from the past season growth and cut stems between six and 18 inches long about ¼ inch from a node (where the leaf would have been attached). Check to make sure there are no signs of fungus or insect damage on the stem and that it is approximately the diameter of a pencil. Dip the bottom end of the cutting into the rooting hormone, poke a hole in the media and place the cutting or cuttings into the pot filled with growing media. Ideally there should be two nodes below the media level and at least two above the surface. By poking a hole in the media before placing the cutting into the pot you keep the hormone from getting rubbed off as you place the cutting in the pot.

Most hardwood cuttings can be left outside in the container until spring when growth should begin. Monitor so that it does not dry out or become too wet and protect from hard frost. Roots will begin to form when the plant normally breaks dormancy.

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.