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Healthy Garden Tips

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ROSE PROPAGATION

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Do you have a favorite rose in your garden that you would like to have more of? Perhaps friends have admired the rose and you would like to give them a bush for their own garden. If the plant still has its nametag or you bought it and recall its name, getting more from a nursery is easy. But what if you don't know its name? Maybe the rose was in the yard when you moved in and had no tag.

Some roses, such as 'Double Delight,' are easy to identify because there are no others like them. Others are exceedingly difficult to name because there are so many of similar color and shape. If you can't identify your rose, the best way to get more is to multiply what you have.

Save up your half-gallon milk, juice or ice cream cartons. Wash them well and cut the tops off the milk or juice cartons. Make a few slits in the bottom of the cartons with a sharp knife and you have the perfect containers for "slipping," or reproducing, roses.

Fill the cartons two-thirds full with perlite. With sharp, sterilized cutters, cut rose stems that have just finished blooming. These stems contain the elements that generate new growth.

Snip off any blooms and dip the stems in a bucket of water with two tablespoons bleach to kill any pathogens. Rinse with plain water. Remove the leaves from the bottom of your cuttings to expose two nodes. (A node is a joint where lateral growth occurs.) Cut the remaining leaflets in half to take some stress off of cutting. Now dip the cuttings in rooting hormone, available from a nursery, to coat the exposed nodes. Place each cutting in a carton, covering up the two lower nodes.

Gently water your slips. You will notice that the perlite expands, which is why you don't fill the carton. Check to make sure excess water runs out the bottom of the carton. Mark the date and the name of the rose (if you know it) on a plant tag or Popsicle stick and place in each container. If you don't know the name, give it your own: orange climber or red number one, for example.

Place your cartons outdoors in a shady place sheltered from wind. Keep the slips watered but not sopping wet until you see a little green growing from the top nodes. Depending on your weather, this may take six to eight weeks. The growth indicates that your slips have rooted and it is time to pot them.

Use clean gallon containers and fresh potting soil from the nursery. Don't forget the markers. Water the new plants with a dilute solution of rose fertilizer. Place them where they get a little morning sun but no midday or afternoon hot sun.

As healthy leaves form, you can gradually expose the plants to more sun. After a few months, you can plant them in the garden permanently or give them to a friend. Remember to keep the label with them at each move. It's also a good idea to keep a garden notebook, noting when you planted the rose and when it blooms.