

Rooting Roses

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Some tips on easy propagation are supplied by a gardener who has well over 1,000 rose bushes but says he bought fewer than 100 of them.

Climbers, old roses and others having pliable cane multiply readily by layering. In spring after the first flush of bloom, a long cane is bent over and buried in a trench about 6" long and 3" deep, with 10" to 12" of the cane end extending up beyond the trench. The section to be buried is wounded by notching it, and the soil mix used to fill in the trench should be made up of 30% finished compost or earthworm castings and 70% loam soil.

The buried portion is anchored with a staple made from a wire hanger. Good rooting usually occurs in 8 to 10 weeks, whereupon the new plant is cut off and left in place or moved to a new spot with as little root disturbance as possible and keeping the soil moist for a month.

For hybrid teas and others with stiff canes, cuttings are taken, 14" to 16" long (6" to 8" for miniatures), about the thickness of a pencil and having a fully open rose and at least five leaves. Cut early in the morning and immediately put the cut stems in water. Each stem will be planted in the bottom of 6" of a plastic bottle which you have cut off and filled with coarse sand (save the top).

When ready to plant, cut off the top stem end containing the bloom, the first leaf, and strip off the two lowest leaves. An important trick: use a razor blade to make several 1" slits through the outer bark at the bottom of the stem; this promotes better rooting. Dip the stem in rooting hormone and plant it so that the remaining leaves are at the surface of the sand.

The top of the bottle is then replaced with duct tap (but without the cap), and the bottle is kept moist and shaded until about 1" of new growth has appeared. The top can then be removed and the new plant hardened off in shade before being planted in a sunny spot.

Little is known about mycorrhizal associations on roses, but it might be a good idea when planting a cutting to mix in a some soil from around the plant from which the cutting was taken, to supply the right strains of these beneficial fungi.