



Sallie Lee
Urban Regional Extension Agent
News Release

Propagating favorite roses, without all the fuss

Question: My grandmother has the most beautiful rose bushes and I want to take cuttings off them to start my own. I've heard all sorts of 'how to' suggestions, like putting a mason jar over the cuttings, using a baggie, or just sticking the cuttings straight into the ground. What method should I use to ensure success with her roses, as they are really special to me?

Answer: One of the most popular "passalong" plants, the rose evokes fond memories for most of us. The scent of my mother's deep red roses reminds me of a glass of fresh tea on a hot summer day, a treat for visual and olfactory senses. Since these were old roses, the offspring of HER mother's rose bush, they grew as well as or better from cuttings than if they'd been grafted onto other rootstock, which is how most modern roses are propagated.

While you're not likely to see 90% success with processes suggested in this article, neither will you need special structures, watering systems, or intense monitoring. Success varies due to the large number of variables involved, but a 50-75% rooting rate is normal.

While roses can be rooted any time of year, for most varieties the cool months from November through February are preferred. Late fall is good for ever-blooming types since there may be a few blossoms remaining to help identify them.

The tip of a stem that recently bloomed is generally the easiest part to root. If withered flowers or hips are present, remove them down to the first set of healthy leaves. Cuttings should be 6-8 inches long, and removed at a 45 degree angle from the parent plant. If cuttings dry out or are exposed to extremes of heat or cold, success rates nose-dive. Available in liquid and powder form, a rooting hormone is considered by some to be very important to success rates. Others consider rooting "helpers" a non-essential expense. If used in your propagation activities, follow instructions to make the most of the product.

It's important to choose the correct site for sticking the cuttings into soil. Although roses prefer sunny locations, for rooting purposes they appreciate protection from the afternoon sun, especially in the summer months. Bright but indirect light is preferred. Other favorable site characteristics are well-drained, sandy soil that stays moist and a bed next to a building that faces north or east. The sandy soil should be amended with 1/4 to 1/3 peat moss, composted pine bark,

or other organic material, which is tilled or otherwise incorporated to insure a good blend of all products.

After removing foliage from the lower half of the cutting, stick the cutting into a bed or pot; leave foliage on the upper part of the cutting in order for leaf-induced photosynthesis to take place. Use a wooden pencil or dibble to make a hole for each cutting, and then place the cutting about half its length into the rooting media. Unless you have a really good memory, use a permanent marker to record variety (if you know it), color and the date so you'll know how long the cutting has been in the ground or pot. Soil around the cutting should be firmed up and watered thoroughly.

If all this sounds a bit intimidating, there are other ways to “skin this cat.” One called “Grandma’s Mason Jar” may be the easiest way to take cuttings. Involving a clear quart-sized mason jar or a 2-liter plastic bottle with bottom cut off, all you need is a rose stem about 6” long stuck into soil a couple inches deep and covered with the jar or bottle, out of direct sunlight. Keep soil around the jar/bottle watered so stems don’t dry out, and in a couple of months rooting should occur and new leaves should appear. Again, the recommended time for this activity is when temperatures are not nearing 100 (too hot) or are less than 32 degrees (too cold).

A few tips and reminders for rooting your precious rose bush:

- When taking cuttings, use sharp instruments to prevent crushing the stem
- Rooting hormone is optional; most report higher success rate with it
- Label cuttings with their proper name
- It takes 4-8 weeks for cutting to root, depending on weather and variety of rose
- Keep cuttings consistently moist but not waterlogged
- Good air circulation and sunlight are critical
- Slit bottom of stem to encourage rooting

For more information about this topic or other horticulture related questions, please contact Sallie Lee, Urban Regional Extension Agent at the St. Clair County Extension office by calling (205) 338-9416 or email leesall@aces.edu.