

Timely Tips Series

Rooting Azaleas

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When azaleas finish blooming and you are still thinking about how beautiful they are, why not root a few cuttings for additional plants? This is one of the easier plants for homeowners to propagate. Propagation requires a minimum of effort and equipment.

Fill a large flower pot with sphagnum peat moss, and firm down slightly in the pot. Use peat moss that is damp but not so wet that water can be easily squeezed out of it (Figure 3).

Cuttings should be taken from new growth that has not yet hardened off. Late May to early June is the

period during which cuttings are usually taken (Figure 1). Each cutting should be about 3 to 4 inches long with the leaves on the lower half removed (Figure 2).

A rooting hormone, available from most garden centers, speeds up rooting and increases the number of cuttings to successfully form roots. Apply according to directions on the package before sticking the cuttings in the rooting media. Cuttings will root without the hormone, but rooting will be slower and a lower percentage of cuttings will root.

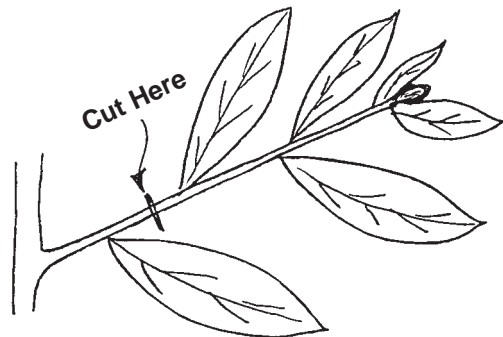


Figure 1



Figure 2. Strip off lower leaves. Leave two to three leaves at top. Treat lower 1/2 inch with rooting hormone.

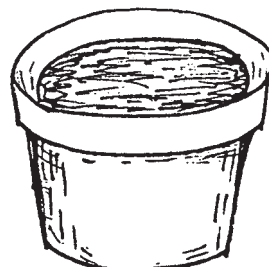


Figure 3. Fill large flower pot with damp peat moss. Firm down slightly.

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Stick the cuttings 1 1/2 to 2 inches deep, and firm the peat moss around the cuttings (Figure 4). Twenty to 30 cuttings can be stuck in a 6-inch flower pot. Leaves should barely touch.

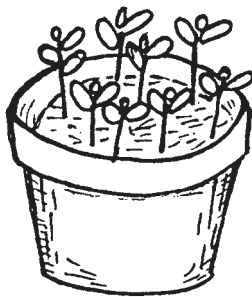


Figure 4. Stick cuttings in damp peat moss.

Straighten two coat hangers and bend them into “U” shapes. Stick the ends of the wire into the peat moss on each side of the pot so the two “U”s cross at the top (Figure 5).

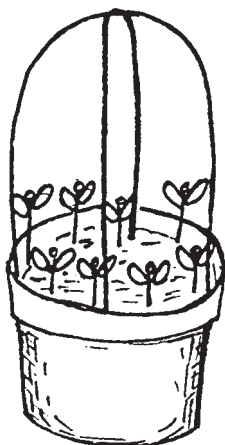


Figure 5. Bend coat hangers to form support for plastic covering.

Place pot, cuttings and wire supports in a large plastic bag. Tie the plastic bag about the wire supports (Figure 6). Place the entire unit in a shaded area, like the north side of the house, and wait two to three weeks to check for rooting. No watering will be necessary during this time.

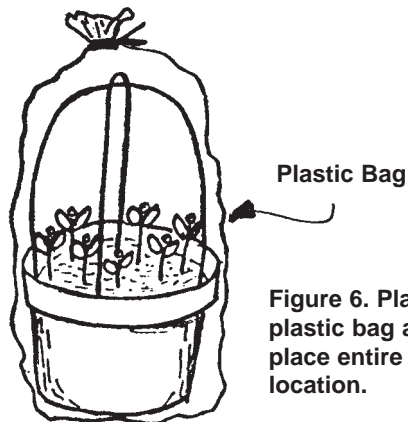


Figure 6. Place pot in large plastic bag and tie. Then place entire unit in a shady location.

To check for rooting, untie the plastic bag, grasp a cutting and pull up gently. If the cutting slips out easily, replace it and reseal the plastic bag. Check cuttings weekly for rooting until most are rooted.

If the plastic bag is kept sealed, there is no need to water the cuttings until they are removed from the rooting pot and potted in individual pots or set out in a cool, shady area.

Cuttings started in the spring should make 4- to 6-inch plants the first year. To encourage branching, pinch the tops out as the cuttings begin to grow. This technique works well with other easily rooted plants such as boxwood, hollies and deciduous flowering shrubs.

This material was originally prepared by Kenneth R. Scott, retired Extension horticulturist - ornamentals.

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