PLANT LIFE COLUMN

PLANT PROPAGATION

Looking for an inexpensive way to increase the plants in your landscape? With the new summer growth on your landscape plants and the warm weather, now is the perfect time for propagating them by the layering method. Layering is the process of rooting a new plant from a branch that is still attached to the parent plant. This method usually yields large plants in a relatively short amount of time. If you start now, you may have new plants ready for transplanting by the end of the year.

Maturing branches that are healthy, show vigorous growth, and are from pencil size to ¾" in diameter should be chosen for layering. These types of branches have more food reserves than other parts of the plant and therefore root faster. Branches that would usually be pruned when shaping the plant are a good choice. There are a number of ways to layer plants, however, the three most popular types of layering are tip, trench and air layering.

Tip and trench layering are the easiest of the three methods, but can only be done if the plant has long, flexible branches. Tip layering can be used to propagate most trailing or viny plants, such as climbing roses, jasmine, or oleander. This is the process of burying the tip of a branch in the ground and waiting for roots to form, creating a new plant.

The first step in tip layering is to "wound" the plant 4" to 5" from the tip by removing a ½" to 1" ring of bark. It is important to scrape the branch clean to the bare wood. This guarantees the removal of the cambium layer. If this layer is not removed completely, new bark will form on the branch instead of roots. A rooting hormone may be applied to the wounded area. This is not required, but will encourage root growth.

After wounding the branch, secure the injured area 2" to 3" in the soil with a pin or rock. It is essential that the soil is kept moist at all times. Depending on the plant, it will take 4 weeks to a year to form roots. When roots are formed, the layered portion of the plant may be removed from the parent plant and transplanted to another location.

Trench layering is similar to tip layering except that a longer branch is placed in a trench and the tip of the branch is kept out of the soil. This method will produce several new plants. It works best with plants whose buds will break and grow under the soil, such as willows, viburnum, grapes, and dogwoods.

Air layering is usually used to propagate hibiscus, camellias, azaleas, or magnolias. The air layer should be created about 12" from the tip of the branch. First, remove all the leaves and twigs 4 inches above and below where the layer is to be made. "Wound" the plant, as was done in the other methods. Apply rooting
hormone and wrap a handful of moist sphagnum moss around the wound, securing it with twine. Next, place clear plastic around the moss, holding it on with rubber bands. This will keep it from drying out. The final step is to cover the ball with aluminum foil or freezer paper to keep out excess heat.

In one month to a year, roots will develop in the sphagnum moss ball and be visible through the plastic. When this occurs, the layered branch can be removed from the parent plant and transplanted.

Plant propagation is a very inexpensive and easy way to multiply your existing plants. Layering is just one of the many types of plant propagation. More information on layering and other plant propagation methods can be found in the IFAS publication at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG108 This publication is also available from the Osceola County Extension Service.

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