

## Take Cuttings to Propagate Ground Covers

Using simple techniques, home gardeners can propagate ground covers from cuttings to help fill in and improve their landscape.

Ground covers are useful for areas in the home landscape that don't lend themselves to lawn or flowerbeds. They require less maintenance than either lawn or flowerbeds, and add texture and variety to the home landscape.

Early summer is a perfect time to propagate them. Find a source for the ground cover you would like to use, such as a small patch already present in your landscape, or in a friend's or neighbor's landscape. Then assemble the few things you'll need for a home propagation unit for taking cuttings.

- a disposable aluminum cake pan
- perlite to fill the pan
- a large transparent plastic bag such as dry cleaners use
- rooting hormone powder #1
- two coat hangers *or* four small bamboo sticks
- a plant mister

### ***Then follow these steps:***

- Moisten the perlite in the pan, but drain off all excess water so none sits in the bottom of the pan.
- Take cuttings from the existing ground cover. Use the tips of the plants only, cutting stems four or five inches long with an angled cut. Remove all leaves except the first three or four at the tip. Dip the cutting in rooting hormone powder #1 and shake off any excess.
- Using a pencil, make a hole in the perlite that is almost the depth of the pan. Insert the cutting,
- and firm the perlite around it. Continue until all the cuttings are inserted into the perlite. Make sure each cutting has enough room to develop a good-sized root ball. Mist the cuttings.
- Insert the four bamboo sticks at each corner of the pan or cut and bend two coat hangers into arches and insert one at each end of the pan. Put the cutting-filled pan in the plastic bag and twist the bag shut to provide a humid, protected environment
- Put the propagation unit in a warm, bright spot away from direct sun. (A window curtained with a sheer fabric is ideal.) Mist the cuttings periodically and don't let them dry out. Add water (*sparingly*) as needed so that none sits in the bottom of the pan.
- In about two weeks, root balls should have begun to form. To check, tug gently at one or two of the cuttings. If there is resistance, roots have developed. Begin to "wean" the plants from the protective environment of the propagation unit by leaving the plastic bag open for longer periods each day, starting with 20 to 30 minutes.
- When root balls are formed and the plants are weaned, transplant the cuttings into 4-inch pots using a potting mix that is one part sterile soil, one part perlite, and one part peat moss. Move the pots outside to a semi-shaded location, and keep them moist.
- The new cuttings can be planted in late summer or the following spring. If they are not to be planted until next spring, leave them outside during the winter *in a protected spot*.

## Take Cuttings to Propagate Ground Covers

The following are ground covers that can be propagated by this technique:

Name of Ground Cover	Characteristics
❖ <i>English ivy</i>	Low growing and green all year. Can be planted in sun or shade
❖ <i>Rockspray cotoneaster</i>	Good in sunny locations. Has low arching branches that look especially good in rock gardens
❖ <i>Barberry</i>	Low growing, slow to spread and evergreen with attractive red fruit in the autumn. Needs well-drained, acidic soils
❖ <i>Perennial geraniums</i>	Can be grown in sun or part shade and in addition to their lovely delicate foliage they have dainty red, pink or purple flowers
❖ <i>Dwarf bush honeysuckle</i>	Unlike the larger varieties, it grows only two or three feet tall. Can be grown in sun or shade and has small yellow flowers in summer
❖ <i>Grow-low aromatic sumac</i>	If grown in full sun, it reaches a modest height of two feet and its leaves provide red colors in the autumn
❖ <i>Low-growing, spreading roses</i>	<i>Examples:</i> White and Scarlet Meidiland, Nearly Wild, Bonica, and the Memorial Rose do best in full sun and soils with good drainage. These roses usually bloom all summer long
❖ <i>Creeping thyme</i>	Low growing, drought resistant and evergreen. Requires a location with full sun
❖ <i>Euonymus</i>	Will grow in sun or shade. It is semi-evergreen with foliage of varying colors
❖ <i>Evergreen candytuft</i>	Needs full sun and well-drained soils. Reaches only 6 to 8 inches in height; in early summer is covered with white flowers
❖ <i>Sedum spurium</i> (two row stonecrop)	Prefers a sunny, dry location. It is about 6 inches tall and provides pink or white flowers

Because ground covers are usually grown in areas the gardener wishes to be low maintenance, it makes sense to plant the covers closely enough so that they will blanket the area in one year. That way, the area needs to be cultivated and weeded only for one growing season. After that, the plants should require minimal maintenance.

To achieve one-year coverage, plant the small plant varieties (like creeping thyme, English ivy and candytuft) six inches apart. Larger varieties, such as roses, can be planted a foot apart.

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