

PROPAGATING HOUSEPLANTS BY AIR LAYERING

Air layering is a propagation technique used with single woody stemmed plants which root too slowly for stem cutting to be effective. Air layering is commonly used on plants which have grown too tall or perhaps have lost attractiveness. This method salvages the tip portion of the plant which is still full of leaves and healthy. Plants to propagate this way include dieffenbachias, rubber trees, and dracaenas.

To air layer, first select the point where you would like the roots to grow. Usually this is at a node just below the bottom leaf cluster. Using a sharp knife or razor blade, make a wedge-shaped cut through the node and halfway across the stem. Do not sever the stem completely. Thoroughly dust the cut with rooting hormone powder. Wet a handful of whole sphagnum moss and wrap it around the cut, stuffing a small portion of the moss into the cut to keep it open. Take a plastic bag or a sheet of plastic kitchen wrap and wrap it securely around the ball of sphagnum moss. Tie it at the top and bottom with twist ties, then seal with string or tape. The bag must be tightly closed to retain moisture.

It may take 2 or more months for roots to develop. During that time, if the moss has become dry, open the top of the plastic wrap and pour in enough water to wet it. Meanwhile, water and feed the parent plant as usual.

When you see roots through the plastic, remove the plastic and fully cut through the stem the rest of the way to sever the new plant with its roots intact. Then plant it in an appropriate potting medium. The planting medium should be vermiculite, perlite, or another soilless mix. The trunk of the old plant may or may not develop new growth.

MSU Master Gardener Training Manual, Indoor Plants, P. 20

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