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## Gardening - propagating your own plants

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### Summary

- One of the wonders of gardening is creating your own plants.
  - Growing plants can be free if you collect seeds from your previous crop.
  - Some perennials will grow well from a cutting taken from an established plant.
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Growing your own food is a wonderful experience for so many reasons. One of the real wonders of gardening is actually 'creating' (propagating) your own plants. Whether you are planting tomato seeds or dividing clumps of mint, you can easily grow your own food from scratch.

The major forms of plant propagation that you might use in your edible garden include:

- Growing from seed
- Growing from cuttings
- Dividing plants
- Growing from runners.

Try a variety of methods, and above all, have fun.

### Growing plants from seeds

Growing plants from seeds is not only cheap and fast, but can be free if you collect seeds from your previous crop for planting out in the next season. The three major ingredients that most plants need to germinate (sprout) include:

- Moisture
- Warmth
- Soil (or potting mix).

All seeds have slightly different needs, so it is important to read the seed packet (if you have one) and to research how and when to plant each variety. The packet will also tell you how deeply to plant the seeds and how far apart from each other they should be sown.

In general, a seed needs to be buried to the same depth of soil as the size of the seed itself. Therefore, very small seeds will only need a sprinkle of soil to cover them. However, if a seed is one centimetre long, make sure it is covered with one centimetre of soil.

### Growing plants from cuttings

Growing a plant from a cutting involves cutting a piece off an existing plant with a sharp, clean knife and placing it in potting mix to create a new plant. This method of propagation works well with certain types of perennial plants (plants that grow from season to season and don't die off after flowering).

One group of plants that is particularly easy to grow from cuttings is the family Lamiaceae, which includes rosemary, lavender, sage, mint and thyme. Vietnamese mint can be very easily propagated by leaving a cutting in a glass of water until it sends out roots, then planting it in the garden or in a pot.

## When to take cuttings

In spring, when plants are sprouting abundant new growth, take your cuttings from the soft new growth on the tips of stems.

Towards the end of the summer and early autumn, semi-hardwood cuttings (darker green growth, from the current year) should be taken from four nodes down from the tip of the stem. A node is a place on a stem where one or more buds sprout.

In winter, hardwood cuttings can be taken (for example, from grapevines). The hardwood is the older, harder growth on a stem from the previous year. It is typically brown and woody.

## How to plant cuttings

Once you have taken your cutting, dip the cut end in honey to prevent infection, or in hormone powder or gel, to help roots to form. Remove the bottom couple of leaves (or all of the leaves from hardwood cuttings).

Poke a hole in the soil or potting mix with a dibber (this can be a pencil, a chopstick or a finger), and place the cutting in the hole and firm the soil around it. If you make the hole with the cutting itself, you could damage it.

Water your cuttings and leave them in a warm, sheltered, shaded position with plenty of light. You could cover the pot with a plastic bag or cut-off plastic bottle to create a mini-greenhouse and retain moisture. Softer cuttings will grow roots faster than hardwood cuttings.

## Dividing plants

Clumping perennial plants (such as mint, tarragon and oregano) can also be lifted and divided into smaller clumps and transplanted, to create new, revitalised plants.

Dig up your plant when it has finished flowering and gently remove the soil from the roots. Use a sharp knife to divide the plant, and remember not to let the roots dry out. Plant each division into the soil, adding compost at the same time.

## Growing plants from runners

Many plants send out shoots that run across the ground and will take root where they touch a bare patch of soil. You can easily turn these into separate plants by cutting off the runner and planting it separately. A good example of this type of propagation is the strawberry plant.

## Where to get help

- Community or local garden groups
- Horticultural Therapy Association of Victoria Tel. (03) 9836 1128
- Cultivating Community Tel. (03) 9429 3084
- Department of Health Victoria, Prevention and Population Health

## Things to remember

- One of the wonders of gardening is creating your own plants.
- Growing plants can be free if you collect seeds from your previous crop.
- Some perennials will grow well from a cutting taken from an established plant.

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Horticultural Therapy Association Vic.

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