

Receiving Rooted Cuttings

Rooted cuttings are a common first stage in propagating specific varieties of ornamental plants. From this stage they are grown out to a retail or landscaping size. For both the commercial nursery and the advanced gardener they are a relatively inexpensive way to build a retail inventory or a prized collection. Handling rooted cuttings when they are received is similar to larger plants. Only a few points need to be kept in mind.

When the boxes arrive have several items ready at hand. These include an appropriate potting mix, plant containers, water, fertilizer and a shady and sheltered location. An appropriate potting mix will drain rapidly and retain a good amount of water, but more air. An example would be a mix composed of 75% medium bark, 20% perlite, 5% coarse peat moss and somewhat moist. The peat percentage should be adjusted for your frequency of watering. If the plants will be watered daily during the growing season little or no peat may be necessary. At White Cloud Nursery we use one-quarter inch coconut hull chips plus 20% perlite, finding the chips readily absorbent, even when dry, but having considerable air spaces in conjunction with the perlite. For cuttings with root balls filling the three inch pots, we recommend moving them up to six inch azalea pots which are approximately 6 inches in diameter and 5 inches tall (15x13cm). Smaller root balls may be accommodated in smaller containers.

As soon as possible after receiving them, unpack the shipping cartons carefully. Plants are carefully squeezed and secured into boxes to eliminate plant movement and reduce shipping costs whenever possible. Untangle any branches hooking each other and carefully lift out each plant individually. At White Cloud Nursery we ship rooted cuttings in their original 3 inch square containers inside a polyethylene bag. We root in pure perlite, a very sanitary but coarse material that will dry out quickly if not watered frequently. If the perlite feels dry or if you cannot pot up the cuttings immediately, open up the bags, cut holes in the bottom of the bags, then water the plants, showering the leaves. Transplant as soon as possible.

Depending on the length of rooting and the characteristics of the plant variety, including its natural size, the root ball may be from one inch in diameter to entirely filling the three inch container. There will be variability in the top growth also. Some vireya varieties will fill the container in four months while others are only the one inch diameter after eight months. Nonetheless the plants should not remain in the pure perlite for too long a period of time. Even with a small root ball, the cuttings may be moved up to an appropriate sized container and good potting mix.

Remove the cutting's container from the plastic bag. Push the cutting out of the container by pushing from the bottom, rolling or bending the sides of the container if necessary. **Do not** pull the cutting out of the container by the stem. Keep the plant's name tag (inserted in the container) with the cutting at all times to avoid confusion. Supporting the root ball in one hand examine it closely. If the roots have not penetrated to the inner surface of the container, gently tap or shake off the excess perlite. The roots will be exposed and radiate outward from the stem. If the roots filled the container they will appear flattened and even glazed in appearance from pressure against the container interior. In this case gently rub the flattened roots to spread them out. Some raggedness is

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OK. The purpose is to encourage the roots to move outward into the surrounding potting mix rather than to grow inward.

Have a larger plant container ready about half filled with your potting mix and lightly firmed down. Continue to support the root ball in your hand because it is possible for a large portion of a root ball to tear off. This is generally not fatal. Once the rooting process has begun, under reasonable conditions, it will continue. However losing a portion of the root ball is a setback for the plant. Place enough firmed-down potting mix under the root ball to set the top of the root ball one-half to one inch (1-2cm) below the top of the container. Place the root ball on top of the mix and sprinkle potting around the root ball. **Gently** push the potting mix under the root so that the ball is well supported without large air gaps. Insure that the ends of the root filaments are well integrated with the potting mix. Continue to add mix around the root ball. Press the mix down lightly around the circumference of the container until the mix is within one-half to one inch of the top of the container and level with the top of the root ball. Only press gently directly over the root ball to avoid dislodging any roots. Sprinkle approximately one-half teaspoon of controlled release fertilizer (or your favorite fertilizer) around the drip line of the plants. Water thoroughly and place in a location of about 50% natural light and at least 60 degrees F. If there is any soft growth it may droop temporarily. Within a few hours of watering recovery should be evident. It is recommended that the plants remain in a sheltered location for a week at least.

Notes