

Yard and Garden – 08-08-09 – Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

Why not increase your greenery and at the same time save some pocket green? Those foliage and flowering annuals planted in May have been rewarding us with their beauty for over two months, and if all goes well, they should continue to reward us for another two months. Although it may seem a bit early, now is a great time to start taking cuttings from those beauties. The extra plants one creates could be added inside the home, set out into the garden or even shared with friends.

Waiting until fall to take cuttings has its risks. Although I hate to admit it, that is generally when I start taking cuttings from my favorite plants. Furthermore, I usually wait until the weatherman forecasts the arrival of a killing frost. By waiting until then, I have but one chance.

Taking cuttings now of your favorite annuals such as coleus, geraniums, fibrous-rooted begonias and impatiens is an insurance. Also, now while plants are vigorously growing, they provide an abundant source of cutting material. Furthermore, if something happens to the first cuttings, there is still time to try it again. All cuttings are not guaranteed to root or grow into new plants; thus, I always suggest that you take more cuttings than you think you might need.

Cuttings should be taken from the stem tips of healthy, vigorously growing plants. It is best to select stem shoots which have no flowers or flower buds. If flowers or buds do exist, remove them immediately after taking the cutting. Use a sharp knife and cut just below a leaf node. Usually, three to four inch cuttings work best.

Remove the lower leaves from the stem shoot but keep a minimum of two leaves at the top of the cutting. One can either place the cuttings directly into a container of fresh water or dip the cut end of each stem in a rooting hormone and insert it in moist sand, vermiculite, perlite or some other sterile rooting medium. To retain moisture in the medium, cover the containers with a clear plastic or glass dome, and place the cuttings in a warm location.

Avoid exposing the cuttings to direct sunlight. The heat from direct sunlight can easily destroy the plants. For best results, place the cuttings under fluorescent lights. Sixteen hours a day under a combination of cool and warm white lights or full spectrum bulbs (grow-lights) works best.

In two to three weeks, roots should form. If cuttings are made in a rooting medium where the roots cannot be seen as they develop, look for new leaves. New leaves are an indication of successful rooting, and when noticed, the cutting is usually ready for transplanting.

One word of caution — outdoor plants brought indoors often bring outdoor problems with them. Before taking cuttings indoors, look closely for insects. Insects may go unnoticed until a

population explosion occurs indoors. It is best to check cuttings and transplants closely and routinely. If pests or problems occur, either treat with the proper insecticides or discard those infected plants to prevent a major infestation.

While the opportunity presents itself, take cuttings now. You can always add more plants to the landscape, share them with friends or take them indoors and enjoy them as houseplants. If you winter over the new plants, the result will be more greenery for next season; at the same time you'll create a bundle of savings of pocketbook green. Furthermore, it's fun.