

Rustlers' Favorite Methods of Rose Propagation

By Marilyn Almon

Fall always delivers a renewed enthusiasm for gardening to those who have weathered the summer heat, and rose aficionados are no exception to that observation. In anticipation of the Fall Cutting Exchange enjoyed by Texas Rose Rustlers every year, some of our members have generously shared their favorite methods for perpetuating their love of roses.

Audrey McMurray has used soil pellets for her cuttings and has had successful rooting in one case in as little as 11 days. She soaks the basal ends in a solution of Medina Plus and Super Thrive and then sticks them into the pellets which have been reconstituted in a see-through plastic cup. The cups are then placed outside in the shade and kept moist as needed with plain tap water.

Then Audrey discovered that she could purchase EcoEarth at a local chain pet store and use it as a substitute for the soil pellets and at a substantial cost savings. EcoEarth is a compressed coconut fiber expandable substrate which holds water at just the right humidity for rooting cuttings. It is primarily used to line reptile cages. Since it is difficult to cut the dry brick, Audrey first hydrates it in a Ziploc bag and then scoops out enough material to partially fill a plastic cup. The cuttings are stuck in the same manner as is done with the soil pellets and the cuttings are watered as needed – usually every few days. Another pet store chain sells a brand named Zilla Coconut and Audrey has used it, but prefers the EcoEarth because it contains fewer of the larger strands of coconut husk.

The Mason jar method is Faith Bickley's favorite method of propagating roses. She prepares her cuttings in the usual method, including the use of a rooting hormone, and fills a 4-inch pot with dampened potting medium. She makes a hole in the center of the medium, fills it with sand, and sticks the cutting into the sand. The pot is then buried in her cutting garden located on the east side of a building under deciduous trees and a jar is placed over the top of the pot. Faith says that she keeps the jars on until there is a good amount of new growth. Containing the cutting in the pot helps to keep the young roots intact when it's time to bump it up. Faith notes that her rooting success rate is greatest in the fall.

High success rates are obtained by Molly Buenrostro, Peter Schaar, Marilyn Pease, and Doana Fite who all use a similar method. Molly prefers the use of clear plastic cups (20 oz. size) for rooting cuttings that have recently bloomed and contain 3 or 4 leaf nodes. She places one cutting in a cup, along with a couple of straws or bamboo sticks that are taller than the top of the cutting. A clear plastic bag is placed over the top and secured by duct tape [rubber bands work also] on the side of the cup to keep the drainage holes open. She can see

through the cup to know when roots have formed, and at that time the bag is removed.

Peter also uses this method and further recommends the use of very aged, fast-draining compost in a plastic pot. He removes all but the top leaves of the cutting and places the pot in bright shade, keeping the secured bag on until top growth appears. The rooted cutting can remain in the pot for the rest of the season and then be bumped up or planted in the garden the following late winter or early spring.

Marilyn recommends the use of a rooting hormone and sticking as many as 6 cuttings in one pot.

Although Doana uses this same method without the plastic bag, she says that her very favorite method for rooting roses that are difficult to propagate is to use the layering process. This is assuming that she has control of the plant, as opposed to it being located in a cemetery. Layering requires gently bending the branch, while it's still attached to the plant, so that a node touches the soil. The node is secured in place and covered with an inch or so of soil. Doana finds that the layering method takes a long time, but it gives the mother plant time to produce her own healthy plants.

Keeping several pots of good soil under her favorite roses allows Carol Selby to really simplify the rooting process. When she prunes, she removes most of the leaves from the cuttings and crowds the best cuttings into the pot under the mother rose. No labeling is necessary since the pots remain in place. She waters immediately and then fairly often in the first month or so. When she prunes the following year, she discovers the new roses that have survived. While the percentage of success may not be as high as with other methods, this technique suits Carol well. With very little energy expended on her part, only the strong roses survive and those are the ones she prefers to grow anyway.

Use of the Forsythe pot is considered to be a virtually foolproof technique by Kathy Hyatt. A Forsythe pot is created by placing a small permeable clay pot, whose drain hole has been plugged with either floral clay or a small cork, inside a larger impermeable pot that has been filled with potting soil or a mixture of vermiculite and perlite. The potting medium needs to be thoroughly dampened and the clay pot must be kept full of water at all times. Then Kathy sticks the cuttings into the dampened medium for rooting and the permeable nature of the clay pot allows the water to transfer to the medium by osmosis. If needed, a mist tent can be formed by loosely draping a dry cleaning bag over chop sticks or dowels inserted around the pot's edge. Kathy advises that when using the floral clay, be sure the pot bottom is clean for best adhesion. Once the cuttings have rooted, they can be carefully removed and potted in gallon nursery containers.

An all-time favorite method used by Rustlers is rooting in the Ziploc bag. June Pence and Frances and Marion Brandes submitted their instructions using gallon or quart bags. June likes to dip her cuttings in a growth hormone solution, place them in potting soil dampened with fish emulsion and water, and then blow into the gallon bag before sealing it.

Frances and Marion recommend taking pencil-sized tip cuttings, where roses have just bloomed, due to the concentrated growth hormones found in that area. To redirect the energy to form roots, remove the lower leaves and the spent bloom. They insert 3 cuttings into a quart-size bag and as many as 5 or 6 cuttings into a gallon bag that contains moistened soil and additional perlite for friability. Rooting hormones are not used and Frances cautions against over-watering. They feel that the months of April and November are optimum times for rooting cuttings. The bags are then placed in an area that receives filtered sun/shade – sometimes hung on the fence by clothespins. They check the cuttings every few days by thumping on the bag to see if moisture is present. If water is needed, a few spoonfuls can be added. Sharpie pens work well for labeling and dating the bags. Frances says that little roots should begin to appear at the bottom of the bag in about 6 weeks.

Gaye Hammond also likes the Ziploc bag method of propagation because it's easy to see how much moisture is collecting inside the bag and the excess can easily be removed, effectively controlling the humidity inside the bag as well. Northern-facing windows tend to get less heat than other windows in the home and the temperature of homes is usually consistent.

Gaye sums up the rose propagation process by stating these facts:

1. All methods work, but with different percentages of success.
2. Success or failure depends upon a host of environmental factors.
3. The most common environmental factors that adversely impact propagation are an over abundance of moisture, humidity, and heat; the presence of disease factors (usually caused by too much moisture and humidity); and transplant shock.
4. The gardener's ability to effectively control these factors has a direct relationship to increased percentages of successful rooting.

Regardless of the methods selected, the main thing is to try various techniques to learn which one works best for you. We're now entering the prime rooting season and the Fall Cutting Exchange promises to provide multiple opportunities for experimentation.