

Make the most of your winter by propagating indoor plants

There are long winter days when a nice book and warm cup of tea come into play, but it's also the ideal time to propagate plants.

Plant propagation is growing new plants by starting them from seed, cuttings, or other plant parts. Propagating a favorite plant for a co-worker's office, house warming gift, or to simply get one's hands in some soil on a windy winter day is low-cost compared to purchasing a plant. Several house plants are relatively easy to grow and multiply by propagation.

Indication of plants ready to multiply

Plants like Pothos and Swiss cheese plants (these plants grow holes in their leaves that make them look like Swiss cheese) often form a node, a slightly swollen part of the plant stem, which

is a growth point. Some may say it resembles a knob. Nodes are where leaves, new buds, and roots will grow from. Roots often develop out of nodes (Figure 1), which are close to the soil surface. If a portion of the plant snaps off in the wild (a rain or cloud forest for some of our houseplants) and falls on the ground, roots will grow out of these nodes and allow that portion of plant to grow into an independent plant. A cutting of a stem with one of these nodes can be a great jumping off point for a propagation project. The cutting can be placed in water, and then that node turns into a root. Voila, a new plant.

Letting a cutting sit in water for a few weeks lets the grower ensure root growth before planting, but also provides a glimpse into root development, something typically not witnessed since it usually happens in soil. Planting multiple cuttings together in the same pot helps stabilize each plant and provide a more robust-looking plant early on.

A running start

A spider plant produces a small spiderette (looks like a mini spider plant, see page 12) from a runner off the parent plant. On the underside of the spiderette, there is a small node and possibly tiny roots indicating the new plant is ready to be in its own pot. The spiderette can be cut and rooted in water as mentioned before or planted in soil to develop its new roots. Additionally, it can be rooted in soil while still attached



Figure 1. The small bumps or knobs on this Pothos stem are the nodes that will develop into roots when placed in water.

to the parent plant. Just cut the runner off once rooted. Again, placing multiple starters together in a pot ensures a larger, fuller pot.

Sometimes the plants make it obvious that the node will become a root, like mentioned above. Most houseplant cuttings without an obvious "root" node can still be successfully propagated. Remember nodes are slightly swollen areas on the stem from which roots, leaves, or buds grow. Nodes with leaves attached can be removed to instigate root growth.

Once cut, the stem can be placed in water to root; no leaves should be below the water surface. Ensure there is at least one node below the water surface in order for new roots to grow. Prayer plants, and other house plants, can be propagated in this way.

Removing lower leaves on a stem can be helpful when placing cuttings in water. The plants may still propagate, but those leaves often become slimy and even a little stinky when hanging out in water for several weeks because of decay and bacterial growth. Allowing just stems to have contact with water keeps the process a little tidier and



Swiss cheese

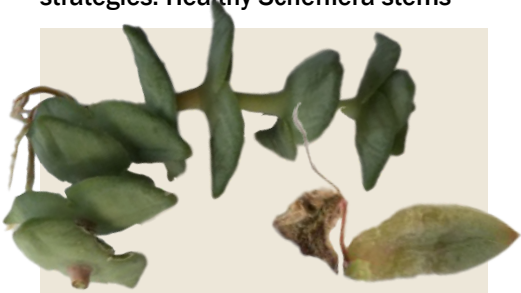
creates a healthier growing environment for healthy new plants.

Getting roots by planting stems

Other plants, like Hoyas, can be propagated by simply clipping long, healthy stems and rooting them in water. They don't give indications of wanting to root like the spider plant, Pothos, and Swiss cheese plants. Make sure the cutting tool is sterilized so disease is not introduced to a cutting or a parent plant. Making cuts close to a leaf makes the cuts less noticeable on the parent plant and will encourage the plant to develop a new stem at that growth point.

The cuttings can be rooted in a jar of water. Long stems can be rooted as well as smaller leaf cuts; the important point is the cutting needs to stay in contact with water without falling out. Sometimes, longer stems or runners are too top heavy and will fall out of the water. Plants rooted in water can be planted in a pot with potting soil once substantial roots have grown on the plants. Keep the container filled with clean water, particularly in smaller containers.

Schefflera, umbrella plant, is another easily propagated plant that can be propagated by two additional strategies. Healthy Schefflera stems



Succulents make great houseplants for busy people, and many are easy to propagate. This leaf and piece of stem fell off a couple of succulents, lay in the shade, and started putting out roots. They can be planted in some potting soil, watered lightly, and left to fully root and grow.



Spider plant

can be cut and placed directly into a planting medium such as potting soil. The use of a rooting hormone can be helpful. Rooting hormones can cost as little as \$10 and can be found online or in most garden supply stores. It's generally a white powder the stem can be dipped into. The hormone encourages strong and quick root development. Roots will hopefully develop within a few weeks, and the plant should begin producing new, healthy, green foliage.

Alternatively, Schefflera can be propagated by air layering. The stem

used for propagation is still attached to the parent plant. A thin slice of the parent plant can be removed, and the exposed area should be buried shallowly in the soil. The stem will need to be staked in place. When roots develop, the buried stem can be cut and separated from the parent plant.

A little more humidity, please

Some plants may respond well to increased humidity. Our Wyoming climate is quite dry. Increasing the humidity for a struggling plant may increase the chances of success. A plastic bag over a cutting can act as a little greenhouse and help create more favorable conditions for the plant. The bag can be removed after the roots have established.

Although it might be winter outside, there is plenty to do indoors starting new plants for yourself, friends, or family. Propagating new plants is a great way to beat the wintertime blues.

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We think we know one activity **Abby Perry** may be doing when winter settles over Carbon County. She is co-coordinator of this magazine and a University of Wyoming Extension educator based in Rawlins. She can be reached at (307) 328-2642 or at ajacks12@uwyo.edu.



Hoya bella. Started as a small cutting in 2019 as an office warming gift.