

Propagation a cheap way to build plant collection

By **DEAN FOSDICK**

For The Associated Press

A creative sideline for gardeners is plant propagation, or enhancing the landscape through reproduction.

It's also a cheap way to fill flowerbeds and herbal containers while prices continue to climb.

Methods of propagation range from seed sowing to grafting, and all require varying degrees of skill.

"For propagation, you don't need an education but you may need some guidance," said Ken Druse, author of the new "Making More Plants: The Science, Art and Joy of Propagation" (Stewart, Tabori and Chang). "Most often, though, it's all about starting plants from seeds."

Seeds are an economical way to grow in bulk, even if you must buy them in commercially prepared packets. "Getting your seeds from a proven source is a good way to ensure high production," Druse said.

Here is a propagation glossary, describing the most commonly used methods:

- Sowing seeds: Druse starts his seeds indoors three at a time in half-inch pots, topping the soil with fine sand. "Moist soil is a great medium for seeds but also for fungus, which can kill a great many sprouts in just a couple of weeks," he said. "Gravel is not a hospitable medium for fungus."

- Stem, leaf or root cuttings: Pieces of the parent plant are cut and placed in water or a suitable growing medium until roots develop. They become clones, or junior versions of the originals and soon are ready for transplanting.

- Layering: A practice usually done with woody plants where living stems are placed on the ground with



Above — A neglected bearded Iris is shown in this photo taken recently in New Market, Va.

Left — Plant seeds grow in New Market, Va.

AP photos

their tips forced downward. They receive nourishment from the parent plants while roots form on the planted ends, enabling them to eventually be separated and grow unaided.

- Grafting: Branches are removed from one woody plant and secured to another until they "take" or begin to grow. That unites certain desirable characteristics from one plant — say hardiness, dwarfing or faster fruiting — with those of its host. Apple trees commonly are grafted, as are Japanese maples.

- Dividing: Perennials

should be divided once they outgrow their sites. That improves their health, bulks up foliage and produces more flowers. "Depending upon the species, these divisions may grow to be as large as the original plant by season's end: more plants for free," Druse said.

"Sowing seeds, cuttings and division are the most prevalent forms of propagation done by home gardeners," said Rosie Lerner, an extension consumer horticulturist with Purdue University. "It's a little work but well worth the effort. It's a matter of knowing which

parts of the plants to split off and divide. Many have a high degree of success."

And then there are plant swaps, which add a social component to garden

building.

Be careful of those pass-along plants from neighbors and friends, though — the kind they're willing to trade because they have so many. Some could be infested with

mites, while others may be invasive.

"Some plants are thugs," Druse said. "Anything so easy to propagate may not be that great to have around your yard."

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