

Appendix C

PLANTING TECHNIQUES

How to take a cutting.

Choose healthy woody stems that are between pencil-sized and thumb-sized in diameter. Make a cut diagonally just below a bud (or node). Make a second cut straight across the stem just above a node so that the cutting is eight to ten inches long. Hardwood cuttings are those taken from late fall until early spring while the plant is dormant. Softwood cuttings are those taken from the soft, new growth in the late spring or early summer, before this growth becomes hardened. Semi-hardwood cuttings are taken from semi-hardened wood in the late summer.

To get these cuttings to root, you may need to dust them with rooting hormones or treat them in certain ways. One easy way to root cuttings is to take the cutting during winter and simply stick it in the garden until spring. Willow and dogwood are two examples of plants that root and grow very easily this way. Once growth has become vigorous in summer, dig up these cuttings and either put them into pots or plant them directly in the intended location.

How to start dormant seeds.

Many of our local shrubs, trees, and perennials have seeds that exhibit dormancy and will not grow, even under perfect conditions, until a certain amount of time (and usually a cold period) goes by. This is their natural mechanism to prevent germination from occurring so late in the summer that the seedlings may be too tender to survive the winter.

In some seeds, dormancy can be broken by a few months in the refrigerator. Often, the cold period is

only effective if the seeds are also kept moist. It is easy to give seeds this “cold-moist” treatment by putting them in a baggie with some moist (but not soggy) peat moss or sand. Keep the baggie in the refrigerator for the required dormancy period. Check the baggie periodically to insure that the medium does not become dry. This process is called stratification.

Some seeds have such a hard seed coat that they also must be scarified before they will germinate. (See below.)

The easy way to get around these requirements might be to allocate a small section of garden to seed germination, plant the seeds there and let Mother Nature do the stratifying. Note that for “tasty” seeds that the squirrels may eat, the garden area should be covered with something protective like metal screen.

How to scarify seeds.

Scarify seeds by rubbing them between two sheets of sandpaper. This nicks the seed coat to allow the seedling to push through. Some sources recommend scarifying with acid or hot water. Experiments with black locust seeds at Mercyhurst College found that, in addition to the sandpaper technique, hot water worked well. To use this method, pour boiling water into a cup, allow it to cool for approximately 5 minutes, then add the seeds and allow them to soak for 12 hours before planting.

How to take basal stem cuttings.

Goldenrods and asters, as well as many other perennials, grow by forming a large clump. If the clump is dug up in spring as growth begins and the soil is shaken off, many small shoots can be seen coming out from below what

used to be the soil surface. These shoots can be pulled or cut apart and planted individually, either in pots or directly into the garden in a protected location. Once the basal cuttings are well established (later in the summer), they can be moved to the desired location.

How to take root cuttings.

Roots (1/2 to 1” diameter) can be dug early in the spring, cut into 2-3” pieces, and stored in barely moist sand in a cool place. After 3 weeks, the root pieces will be “calloused” and can be planted horizontally in soil, pots, or flats. (Method from Dirr, 1987)