

August GARDEN

The garden is in full bloom during this summer month and furthermore is full of opportunity to prolong your display and to increase your stock of plants without paying a penny.

The first tip for the August gardener is a simple but important one: don't set foot in the garden without a good pair of secateurs to hand. Dead-heading is the perfect way to keep things looking perky and to encourage further flowering. However, remember that certain seed heads look good in winter and provide food for the birds, so don't be too snip-happy.

Secondly, this is an excellent time to increase your plant stock by taking cuttings. You can use the new plants in your own garden, or why not swap with a neighbour?

It's a very cheap way of boosting your own garden stock—and you might even end up with a rare or unusual plant that can't be purchased in a garden centre. There's also nothing nicer than being able to give a friend or neighbour a much-wanted shrub you have grown yourself.

The cuttings to be taken now are known as semi-ripe, which means the cutting material should be from this season—soft and green at the growing tip, but slightly browner at the base. Cut the shoot 2-4" long immediately below the base of a leaf joint (or node).

Avoid long, spindly shoots—those with short distances between the nodes are best. Use a clean, sharp knife or razor blade to make the cut and at the same time cut back the shoot remaining on the parent plant to just above the next leaf node. This is because it will die back anyway and there is no point in leaving an unsightly, disease-prone stump left on the plant. Then cut the leaves off the lower half of the shoot—don't break them off.

Dip the cut edge of the shoot into hormone rooting powder and using a dibber or pencil, make a hole in the free-draining compost. Place the shoot into the hole, covering at least one third of its length. Water and then either enclose the plant in a polythene bag or a propagator. Keep it well out of the sun because temperatures will soar inside the bag.



Cuttings you can take now include hydrangea, evergreen ceanothus, cornus, buddleia, philadelphus, deutzia, garrya and berberis. Pot each cutting individually and you won't have the problem of teasing the roots apart next spring when they may have grown together in one huge mass.

Next spring you should be able to plant them out where they are to grow, or proudly present your neighbours with a lovely freebie for their garden.

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