

G ROWING PLANTS FROM SEED

WHEN: Seeds can germinate most of the year but the best times are autumn and spring as extremes of temperature can be avoided.

SEED-RAISING MIX: Any reasonable mix will do—some people like to use a commercial seed-raising mix, obtainable from nurseries but you can make your own using coco-peat and perlite, or two parts coarse river sand, one part coco-peat and one half part perlite.

PRE-TREATMENT OF SEEDS: Many seeds benefit from the use of smoked water. Dilute as per instructions on the bottle and soak seeds. Small seeds can just have smoked water sprayed on them after sowing but some hard seeds such as Acacia, Hardenbergia, Templetonia for example need to be soaked for a few hours or overnight in water that has been boiled and slightly cooled.

CONTAINER: This depends on how many seeds you are sowing. For a small quantity cut down a pot to about 7cm (2 1/2"). For very large seeds, a small tube will be more practical for individual sowing. Fill the container with mix, firm down slightly and water it. Sprinkle seeds lightly on top of the mix and cover - as a general rule cover the seed with a layer of mix the same thickness as the seeds. Gently spray the container.

AFTER-CARE: Punnets of seeds must be kept slightly moist in a warm, sheltered position. They should have plenty of light but no direct sun.

Germination time varies. Some Eucalypts will germinate in 10 days, whereas Hakeas may take up to 6 weeks and some species take months or even years.

DIRECT SEEDING: Some plants such as Everlastings should be sown straight into the ground. Rake over the area, usually after the first rains have dampened the ground, scatter the seed and tread in lightly. Cover with a little compost or leaf mould and you may have to bait for snails.

Large areas can also be treated in this way—pre-treat the seed if necessary and mix with some sand before sowing.

G ROWING PLANTS FROM CUTTINGS

Everybody has their own favourite way of striking cuttings. This is a method used by one of our members very successfully over the years.

WHEN: From cultivated plants, cuttings may be taken at any time of the year. Best results are likely to be obtained from cuttings taken late summer to late autumn. The winter months are often too cold without the use of heated cutting trays.

POTTING MIX: Fill a pot two thirds full of potting mix—one that contains no fertiliser. Put in 2cm (3/4") of river-sand. Top up with potting mix, ensure the whole mix is damp.

PRE-TREATMENT OF CUTTINGS: Always take cuttings from the best plants and do not allow the material to dry out at all. It should be wrapped in damp newspaper then stored in a plastic bag in a cool place such as a refrigerator if they are not going to be used immediately.

Cut 5cm-7cm (2"-3") tip pieces, remove most of the lower leaves and dip the end of the cutting in hormone powder or gel. Leave to set for a few minutes. Make a hole in the potting mix down to the sand—place cutting in the hole and firm gently. Place several cuttings in the pot—do not allow them to touch. Use two pieces of bent coat hanger wire to form arches over the cuttings. Place pot into a plastic bag and blow gently into it to inflate it and tie the top with garden wire tie.

AFTER-CARE: Leave in a light, shady place for 4-6 weeks. Undo tie and gently tug on cuttings. If slight resistance is felt, very gently dig out cutting and pot up. Leave any unrooted cuttings in sealed bag for a further 3 weeks then remove rooted cuttings and leave unrooted ones for a further 3 weeks.

ALTERNATIVE METHOD TO TRY: Place cuttings in a jar of plain water. Leave jar in a sheltered position such as kitchen windowsill, greenhouse or potting bench for a few weeks. Not all native plants will respond to this method but it is worth experimenting!

G ROWING PLANTS BY LAYERING

Some plants will form new roots where their stems come into contact with the ground. You can encourage this by holding down the stems and pegging them into the ground. Make a small cut in the underside of the stem first.

G ROWING PLANTS BY DIVISION

Plants that grow in tufts like Kangaroo Paws can be propagated by dividing the clumps usually in autumn after the rains have started.

Do not make the divisions too small. Trim the leaves and roots and treat the new plants as if they were cuttings until new roots have developed.

They can be transplanted into their new positions or potted up taking care to plant them at the same depth as they were previously.

P OTTING UP

SEEDLINGS: Have a tray of the smallest pots washed and ready. Fill pots to approximately half-full with potting mix, tip on side and make an indent with finger in the mix. Place the seedling, only touching the leaves and not the roots, in the indent. Fill the pot with potting mix, gradually standing the pot upright and making sure the seedling is in the centre of the pot. Carefully and gently press down the potting mix so that the plant will not blow around in the wind.

Do not fill the pot too high or too low with potting mix. A good policy is to place the plant at the same depth it was in the seedling punnet. Put a little water in a bucket, stand the pot in the water and water slowly. This will get any air bubbles out of the potting mix. Make sure there is about 1cm (1/2") space at the top for watering. If necessary more potting mix can be added later.

Keep newly potted up plants sheltered for a while—a plastic bag is ideal for this. Gradually harden plants off by introducing them to garden conditions slowly.

ROOTED CUTTINGS: When roots have formed, gently knock the contents from the pot. Separate the small plants and pot up as described for seedlings.