

Gardener's Grapevine

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Landscaping on a Dime:

Late Autumn Techniques for Growing More Plants

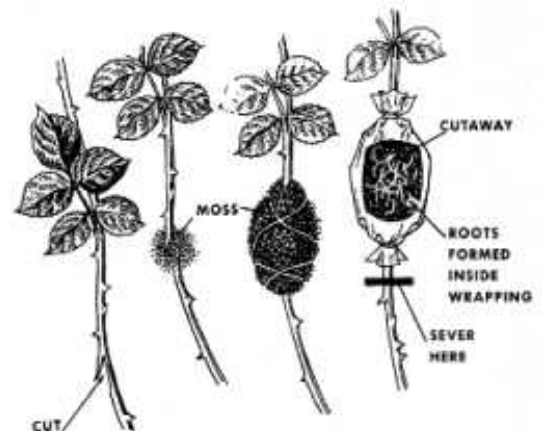
Maggie Wolf, Utah State University Extension Agent

During the recent tight economy, some gardeners may be looking for bargain plants to beautify and build their landscapes. Some bedraggled and forlorn shrubs may be found at the garden center, left over from a hot and stressful summer, marked down to clearance prices. Better yet, there are free plants in your own or in friends' landscapes, waiting to be had! But don't go dig them up yet; read ahead and find out how to successfully propagate these landscape plants while not harming the parent plant.

Many types of shrubs can be propagated by a technique called 'layering'. Layering is a process where a lower section of a shrub branch is bowed to the ground, anchored with soil and weight, and allowed to remain there until roots form. Started in the fall, most layerings will be ready to cut away from their parent plant by spring and planted at their new site.

The first step of successful layering is to find a parent plant that will lend itself to this project. Shrubs like forsythia, weigela, flowering quince,

viburnums, mock orange, daphne, shrub roses, and wisterias can all be easily 'layered'. Almost all vining plants are guaranteed successes. Even some trees may be layered, but the difficulty is finding a branch low enough to be anchored to the ground.



The site around the parent plant should be an undisturbed area, preferably in a mulched bed where turfgrass or groundcover is absent.

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Landscape Trees

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Because the anchor spot is usually near the base of the plant, this is rarely a problem. The chosen branch should be long enough that there is at least one foot length beyond the anchor point, and this branch should be vigorous and healthy.

Remove leaves from the anchor point area of the branch. Nick, scratch or slightly peel the bark of the branch on the underside of the anchor point. Be careful to not take off too much of the bark, and only remove it at the area where the branch will contact the soil. If available, dust the wounded branch with some rooting hormone. Scuff the soil at the anchor site, then pin the wounded branch down into the soil. You can make a U-shaped pin by cutting and bending an old clothes hanger. Place a handful or two of soil over the top of the anchored branch and secure the branch into place with the weight of a stone. The end of the branch should be kept off the soil surface to prevent rotting, so you may prop it up with stones, or provide some well-drained mulch for it to lay upon.

Over the winter, water the layered branches as you would any other woody landscape plants. If we have an unusually mild and dry winter, it may be necessary to water a few times.

Next spring, check your layerings occasionally to see when it has rooted. Uncover the anchor point and remove the anchoring pin. If the branch does not spring up, it may

have rooted. Scratch gently into the soil to check for roots. If a root system at least 3" deep is formed you may cut the layered branch away from its parent and move it to the new site.

For easier harvest of your layered plants, you may want to anchor the wounded branch into a sunken pot. Dig a hole into the soil at the anchor point area, then place a pot into the hole. Fill the pot with the soil from the hole. Be sure that pot has holes for good drainage. If potting mix is used instead of soil, you must check the potting mix moisture regularly. Mulch the area well, since the pot may frost heave over winter.

Layered plants will not be as large and well-shaped as plants from the nursery or garden center, but the price is surely right. For homeowners on a budget, the extra year it will take to reach nursery size is more available than the money that would be spent.

Another benefit of layering is that bloom color and other plant characteristics will be exactly the same as the parent plant. This is important when growing a row or group of shrubs, to achieve unity and consistency in the landscape design.

Side Note On Layering

From: 52 Weekend Garden Projects
by Nancy Bubel, Rodale Press

“A Grain of Wheat for Extra Encouragement...

An old cottager’s custom was to insert a grain of wheat or an oat into a slit in the branch. The grain serves two purposes: It keeps the cut open, and, as it sprouts in contact with the damp earth, it also releases plant hormones that stimulate rooting....”

Demand Quality When Purchasing Trees

Maggie Wolf, Utah State University Extension Agent

Trees are the backbone of any landscape. Trees provide shade, windscreen, bird habitat, privacy, and a great deal of aesthetic value, along with real monetary value, to our homes. Trees may be the more expensive items we add to our landscapes, so it is important to shop carefully and wisely when making this 'investment'.

One guiding rule to remember when choosing replacement trees or trees for new landscapes is that the faster a tree grows, the sooner it will probably die. Willows, poplars, 'Tree of Heaven', river birch, Russian-olive, green ash, honeylocust, and cottonwoods are good examples of this generalization. Faster growing trees provide quick shade, but they should be planted with slower growing trees in the landscape so that when the fast grower dies, the longer-lasting tree will be there to serve its purpose.

The site of the tree must be considered. If power lines are above, choose short trees or tall shrubs to prevent the ugly 'topping' that is bound to happen to taller trees in future years. Near a sidewalk or driveway, avoid planting the 'surface rooting' trees such as ash, mulberry, and elm. Avoid planting any tree closer than 10 feet from your home.

The type of tree should be carefully chosen. Utah State University Extension's publication "Selecting and Planting Landscape Trees" will help guide you through this selection process. This book is available at your local Extension office or on line at <http://extension.usu.edu/files/natrpubs/nr460.pdf>. In general, be sure that the tree can withstand -20°F temperatures, and high pH soils.

Containerized trees may have some hidden problems. Inspect the trees carefully. Check for damage on the trunk of the tree. Small holes may indicate borers or bark beetles. Cankers or discolored and sunken bark can be a sign of disease. Disfigured or smaller than normal leaves may indicate herbicide or other stress damage.

Ideally, the top part of the tree will be in correct proportion to the container or root ball. Discounting the trunk, the mass of the top portion of the tree should be roughly

equivalent to the root ball of the tree. For a young tree with a caliper of 1" (caliper is the diameter of the trunk at ground line just above any basal swell), the root ball or container should be 10 to 12 inches diameter. A caliper of 3/2 inches calls for a root ball or container 30 to 36 inches diameter.

Pull the root system out of the container and inspect the root system. Roots should be visible on all sides of the root ball, but they should be no larger than 1/4". If the plant has been in the container too long, without being moved up to larger pots, the roots may be growing in circles around the pot. If planted directly into the ground, these roots will grow in girth and eventually strangle the tree trunk at the base. Circling roots can girdle a tree many years in the future. If the circling roots are larger than 1/4" diameter, refuse the tree. The extensive root pruning needed to correct serious circling will cause extensive damage to the root system.

The best quality nursery trees will have a good branching structure, indicating that the tree has been well tended. Tall species that have been closely crowded in the garden center lot will have few branches except at the very top. This top-heavy structure can lead to breakage in strong winds, since the wind load is directed solely at the top of the tree.

If the young tree is supported with a stake, cut it loose and inspect whether the tree can stand straight on its own. If it has been staked too much of its life, it will bow over to the ground. Obviously, such a tree should be refused.

Choice of trees for your landscape is something you will live with for several years. Select the appropriate type of tree, be sure it is healthy and vigorous, plant it carefully, then appreciate its beauty and contributions to your home and life.

Controlling Pests: Spiders, Insects, Mice and Weeds

Wade Bitner, USU Extension Horticulturist

“Spiders, bugs, mice, weeds”, What is a body to do about these pests? The first step in control is to determine what the pest actually is.

Spiders are very common now because the fall weather signals them to find a place to over-winter or just lay their eggs and die. Homes are good places to look because they are warm and offer hiding places. There are few spiders that are very harmful. Black Widow spiders are the most common and can be found in most window wells or water boxes. They are making a large white egg case to continue the species. When you remove the spider, remove the egg case as well to reduce the number of spiders for the next year. Hobo spiders may be found downstairs as chance invaders. They are controlled by using ‘sticky’ boards which work as mouse traps as well. Place the trap next to the wall just inside basement doors. Spiders run along side the wall and will be caught by the board. Replace periodically for best results.

Insects (that is the correct name for most bugs) invading homes look for holes to enter the house. Boxelder bugs will be first to congregate on warm walls and enter homes

because they over-winter as adults. Use spray foam insulation to fill holes in bricks or around utility openings into the home. This will prevent entrance by Boxelder bugs and mice.

Mice need food and a warm place to stay. They look for entrances to homes that are ¼ inch or larger. Spray foam is one of the best prevention methods for these critters. Screening, mortar, spray foam, wood will keep invading pests out of your house. A little attention to the problem now will produce great results next spring.

Weeds which are still actively growing may be controlled by broadleaf weed killers. Using 2,4-D to prevent dandelions in lawns will not harm the lawn and produce best results on the dandelions and morning glory. Use trimec for hard to kill weeds like morning glory. Using glyphosate or Roundup like products will kill **all** green growing weeds. This is a good way to remove over-wintering weeds in the garden. Spray soon for best results. For other information, call our help line at 468-3172 or look on line at www.usuextension.slco.org for more information. These suggestions sound simple and they are, but the rewards are very great.

“Utah State University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution.”
