

# Patch & Pot Handbook: Propagation in Small Spaces

## Why Propagation Matters

Propagation is how we multiply plants, often for free. It is one of the most rewarding ways to garden, whether you have a balcony, a back step, or a windowsill. By learning a few reliable techniques, you can make a single basil plant into five, share pots of mint with friends, or carry on a favourite tomato variety for another season. It's both thrifty and joyful.

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## Seed Sowing

Seeds are the beginning of everything. They contain a whole plant in miniature, waiting for the right signals of warmth, moisture, and light.

### Direct sowing (sowing straight into containers or soil)

- Fill a pot or box with compost, firm gently, and water lightly.
- Scatter seeds thinly on the surface. Small seeds (like lettuce) only need the lightest covering of compost. Larger seeds (beans, peas, sunflowers) are pushed down about 2–3 cm.
- Label with the date and variety.
- Keep evenly moist, not waterlogged.

**Best for:** salads, radishes, peas, beans, hardy annual flowers.

### Module sowing (sowing into cells or plugs)

- Fill a seed tray with compost and press gently to level.
- Place one or two seeds in each cell.
- Cover lightly, water with a fine rose or from below.
- Once seedlings have two true leaves, prick out or pot on.

**Best for:** brassicas, herbs, tomatoes, peppers, flowers you want to transplant in neat clumps.

### Pre-germination (on paper or vermiculite)

- Lay seeds on damp kitchen paper or cotton wool inside a container.
- Keep warm and moist, but not soggy.
- Plant into compost once roots show.

**Best for:** older seed where viability is uncertain, beans, peas.

**Caveats:** In cool northern regions, sow later or start seeds indoors. In warmer areas, watch that seedlings don't dry out too quickly.

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# Cuttings

Taking a piece of a plant and encouraging it to root is almost magical. Different plants respond to different types of cuttings.

## Softwood cuttings (spring and early summer)

- Take a young, green shoot about 8–10 cm long.
- Cut just below a leaf joint with clean scissors or secateurs.
- Remove the lower leaves, leaving 2–3 at the top.
- Dip the cut end in water, then in rooting powder (optional).
- Push into damp, gritty compost or place in a jar of water.
- Cover with a clear bag to hold humidity.

**Plants:** basil, mint, pelargonium, fuchsia.

## Semi-ripe cuttings (summer to early autumn)

- Choose shoots that are partly firm but not woody.
- Cut 8–12 cm lengths, strip lower leaves.
- Insert into a mix of compost and sand.
- Keep in a bright but shaded place until rooted.

**Plants:** rosemary, lavender, penstemon.

## Hardwood cuttings (late autumn to winter)

- Select a pencil-thick woody stem, 15–20 cm long.
- Cut just below a bud at the base and above a bud at the top.
- Push two-thirds into open ground or a deep pot of compost.
- Leave outdoors over winter. New shoots appear in spring.

**Plants:** currants, gooseberries, roses, willow.

**Caveats:** In damp regions, cover pots with fleece or cloches to prevent rot. In hot climates, protect from harsh sun.

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## Division

Some plants grow in clumps that naturally enlarge every year. These can be split into several smaller plants.

### Method

- Water the plant well the day before.
- Lift the whole clump out of the pot or ground.
- With hands or a sharp knife, tease or cut the root ball into smaller sections, each with roots and shoots.
- Replant each division in fresh compost, water well.

**Plants:** chives, mint, oregano, hostas, daylilies.

**Tip:** Division rejuvenates old clumps, making them healthier.

**Caveat:** Avoid dividing during extreme heat or drought — spring and autumn are safest.

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## Layering

This method lets a stem root while still attached to the parent plant.

### Simple layering

- Bend a flexible stem down to the soil.
- Wound the underside lightly with a knife (optional, speeds rooting).
- Peg it down and cover with compost, leaving the tip showing.
- Once roots form (usually weeks or months later), cut it free and pot up.

**Plants:** clematis, jasmine, blackberries.

### Air layering (for woody or houseplants)

- Choose a healthy stem.
- Make a shallow cut into the bark.
- Wrap the cut area with damp moss, cover in plastic film to hold moisture.
- After roots form, cut below the new root ball and pot up.

**Plants:** rubber plant, magnolia, camellia.

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# Offsets and Runners

## Offsets

- Bulbs such as daffodils or tulips often form baby bulbs around their base.
- Lift bulbs after flowering, gently separate the small bulbs, and replant.

## Runners

- Strawberries produce baby plants on stems.
- Peg each one into a small pot of compost without cutting from the parent.
- Once roots are firm, snip the stem.

**Tip:** This is the easiest way to build a strawberry patch for free.

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# Grafting and Budding

This is more advanced but worth knowing.

## Grafting

- Take a piece of a plant you want to grow (scion).
- Cut a compatible rootstock.
- Join the two with a clean slant cut, tape firmly.
- Once they heal together, the scion will grow as if it were one plant.

**Common for:** apples, pears, roses.

## Budding

- A single bud is cut from the desired plant.
- Insert it under the bark of the rootstock and tape.
- Once it grows, cut back the rootstock above the bud.

**Caveat:** Needs practice, sharp tools, and is best attempted in late summer.

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# Water-Rooting

A simple and fun way to propagate houseplants and herbs.

- Snip a stem with a few leaves.
- Place in a jar of clean water, ensuring the cut end is submerged but leaves are not.
- Change water weekly.
- Once roots reach 2–3 cm, pot into compost.

**Plants:** basil, mint, pothos, coleus, rosemary (sometimes).

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# Improvised and Low-Cost Methods

Propagation does not need specialist kit.

- Use yoghurt pots or milk cartons with drainage holes as seed trays.
  - Cut the top off plastic bottles to use as mini cloches.
  - Use chopsticks or old spoons as dibbers for pricking out seedlings.
  - A clear storage box with a lid makes an excellent mini greenhouse.
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# Climate Caveats

- **Cooler north:** sow later, protect cuttings with fleece, start seeds indoors.
  - **Warmer south:** watch for drought; seedlings dry out quickly.
  - **Windy coasts:** protect with mesh; avoid fragile cuttings outdoors.
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# Reflection Notes

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