

## PROPAGATION OF HYDRANGEA PETIOLARIS BY CUTTINGS

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*Hydrangea petiolaris* is probably the most popular of the climbing hydrangeas. It will thrive in any aspect, except south, is self-clinging, and once attached to a wall holds fast. With its white, flat flowers in June and July, six or more inches across, it is a plant which ought to be more popular; it is able to succeed in positions where other plants cannot.

When I first became a propagator I tried, in vain, for a couple of years to get *Hydrangea petiolaris* cuttings to root. It was at the I.P.P.S. 1969 Annual Conference at Hadlow, during 'Question Box' time, that a gentleman asked if anybody had succeeded in rooting *Hydrangea petiolaris* cuttings, to which another gentleman answered that it was not difficult to root soft tips early in the season, when made into cuttings about three inches long; the difficulty was in getting these rooted cuttings to grow. So, it occurred to me that, perhaps, I had not been taking my cuttings early enough in the season. My mind was made up to watch the stock plant we have on the nursery during the early spring and take cuttings as soon as sufficient growth was available. When I came to take the cuttings during the latter part of April, I noted that although the shoots looked soft the basal part of the stem, then three to four inches long, was really quite firm and much harder than I had expected; only the last one or two inches of growth was soft. Since then I have found that, so long as the cuttings are soft, a good rooting percentage can be expected. I have taken cuttings from  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 3 inches long, all with success, providing that they are soft to the touch. Seasonal variations seem to play a great part here; one year it is possible to take 3 inch cuttings by the end of April, while in another year one would be lucky to find cuttings one inch in length, by mid-May. My advice is to take the cuttings as early in the season as possible, and as long as possible, providing that the wood was of the correct type, rather than give any particular month or size of cutting. Success can be had from later cuttings, but the earlier that they are prepared, the better their chances of being established before the winter.

Cuttings are prepared by trimming straight across, beneath a node, and removing of the lower leaves. I then dip the base of the cuttings into Seradix No 2 and insert 50 per standard seed box, using a 1:1 peat-sand compost. I have not used any other hormone, as Seradix No. 2 has given satisfactory results; no doubt, though, other brands or solutions of IBA would be just as suitable. The

boxes of cuttings are placed under intermittent mist with a medium temperature of 65° or 70° F.

Rooting can be expected to take place in 4 or 5 weeks and, when ready, they are moved across to a weaner bench for 2 or 3 weeks. After weaning, the boxes of rooted cuttings are moved to a large clearspan aluminum glasshouse, where most of our growing-on is done.

In July the rooted cuttings are potted into 2½ in. peat pots, using a compost which is based on the University of California Mix; they are placed on a sand bed where the plants soon establish and commence growth. By the time winter comes the plants are approximately 6 in. tall, before dropping their leaves. They are overwintered in the same situation, keeping the ambient temperature about 45° F minimum. Very little difficulty has been experienced in overwintering providing that they are established in their pots, and have started to re-grow. When a late batch of cuttings have been successfully rooted — these can be lost. Perhaps the answer would be to get some growth onto the plants by the use of electric lights, although I have not had experience in doing so. The simplest solution is to get the plants rooted early and growing-on, then over-wintering problems do not seem to occur. In any case, it is as well to ensure that too much water is not given while the plants are dormant. Containerizing into 4" diameter polybags is done towards the end of March, again using a U.C. mix; the plants are stood back on the same beds in what can virtually be described as a cold house at that time of the year, applying only gentle heat when severe weather conditions warrant it.

Establishment into the pots is quick and rapid growth, usually in the form of a single leader, can be expected. This leader can be removed and used as a cutting in May; this encourages lateral shoots to form. The plants become a saleable size during that summer and autumn. If there are a few plants left after the traditional dispatch season, it is possible to find small flowers appear on the lateral shoots early in the summer, making the plant an easy seller on the garden centre.

Approximately 80% of the cuttings taken can be expected to root; a few of these, however, can be lost in potting and overwintering; however to get 70% of the number of cuttings taken to grow into saleable plants is good, when compared with the situation five year ago.

This year a colleague of mine tried some cuttings in "Jiffy 7's"; this proved to be successful so we may adopt this method plus liquid feeding, instead of potting into peat pots.