

HORMONES: NOT ALWAYS NECESSARY

JOHN C. LARSEN

*Bailey Nurseries, Inc.
St. Paul, Minnesota 55119*

Do we always need to use a rooting hormone when rooting cuttings? I think the answer is no. Through trial and error over the last eight to ten years, we, at Bailey's, have cut our use of rooting hormones by 25 to 35%.

The main reason we experimented without dipping cuttings in a hormone was to reduce labor cost in the planting of cuttings. Without having to dip cuttings, we figured we would spend about 20 to 30% more time planting instead of dipping cuttings. There is also a cost savings in the amount of IBA that is used.

Our process to determine if a cutting gets dipped or not is fairly simple. Any new taxa on which we do not have information are all dipped the first year. The second year, a small trial of undipped cuttings is tried. If that is successful, the third year we do a larger trial; up to 25 to 50%. After the third year, if we feel comfortable with our trial results, we do not dip that plant.

There are some other factors you might want to consider when dipping cuttings. If you have only a short amount of time to root your cuttings you might want to dip even if they are an easy rooter.

Another factor is timing. If the cuttings are taken a little later than you like or are harder cuttings than you like, you might want to consider dipping when you normally would not. This deals more with softwood cuttings.

I would suggest doing some trials of undipped cuttings if you are dipping all of your cuttings. I think you will find the time savings in not having to dip cuttings very substantial. I also think you can develop a well-rooted cutting that has not been dipped and is properly cared for.