



Topic: Preparing Live Plants for a Swap

I'll Meet You in the Garden with Shellie Wise

Propagating and/or dividing your plants for a Plant Swap is easy but does need a little timing. Decide which houseplants or outdoor perennials and shrubs you intend to swap then begin the process as soon as possible.

For all plants please

1. Remove all soil by brushing or washing it off.
2. Label your portions with the plant name, variety, and details for how to grow & care for the plant.
3. Transport your divisions wrapped in a baggie, plastic wrap, cloth, burlap, tissue paper, etc. so the roots stay moist.

HOUSEPLANTS are propagated or divided anytime but usually right after a winter's rest.

Offsets/Pups Break off or cut off for plants that create offsets like snakes, spiders, succulents, etc. Clean off any soil & place in a jar of cool water to keep the roots moist until it's time for the swap.



Division Remove the plant from its container. Use your fingers to loosen the roots apart. Use your hands or a sharp knife to divide the plant into sections with a good amount of roots attached to each section. Repot the portions you want to keep into fresh soil. Clean off the portions for the swap & place in a jar of cool water to keep the roots moist until it's time for the swap.

Propagation Start the process of as soon as possible to allow the cutting enough time to generate good root growth. On the plant stem, locate the growth points (nodes) near where the leaves emerge. Make a clean cut between those points at a slight angle. On the piece of stem you just removed from the plant, strip off a leaf or two from the bottom part but don't remove any nodes. Place that bottom end in a jar of cool water, deep enough to cover the cut and a few nodes if you have any, to allow roots to grow from the nodes. Change the water as needed to keep it fresh.





PERENNIALS can be divided anytime but usually spring is best right before the new growth emerges. Perennials like peonies, Oriental poppies & Siberian irises are best divided in late summer but will tolerate division if spring is the only option. Dividing Baptisia and Milkweeds is difficult and rarely successful due to long deep taproots. This [Dividing Perennials](#) chart provides information for 125 perennials.

Use a garden fork, spade or shovel to dig around the plant far enough from the crown (center) to get the entire root ball. Lift out the plant. Pull apart the roots, shake off the soil, remove dead leaves & stems then separate the plant into sections by pulling with your hands, cutting with the spade or a sharp knife, or pulling apart using a fork in the center of the clump. Each section should have 3-5 shoots or eyes and a good amount of roots. Discard the dead woody center of the plant & replant the portion you want to keep back into the hole.



Clumping Crowns like many flowers & grasses.

Rhizomes like iris only flower once but grow new rhizomes for the next year's blooms. Discard old one & break off new ones to keep. Other rhizomes, like rhubarb, divide as described above.

Tubers Dig frost-hardy tubers as described above. Bring tubers that are not frost-hardy (tuberous begonias, caladium, canna & dahlia) that you overwintered as is from storage.

Corms like crocus, freesia, gladiolas.

Bulbs like daffodils, hyacinths & tulips.



SHRUBS, like hibiscus, hydrangea, lavender, rhododendrons & azaleas, viburnum, clematis, spirea, forsythia, weigela and many more, are usually best propagated by cuttings taken in spring as the wood is soft & flexible. Cut a 6" section of stem just below a leaf node. Remove the bottom leaves & place that bottom end in a jar of cool water, deep enough to cover the cut and a few nodes if you have any, to allow roots to grow. Change the water as needed to keep it fresh. Process is similar to propagating houseplants.

RESOURCES

[Article on how & when to divide perennials](#) containing links to the 125 perennials chart in both pdf and spreadsheet form.

[Webinar on dividing perennials](#) with a short video around 24:16 on dividing iris.

Video demonstrates [Dividing a Hosta, rudbeckia & salvia](#).