

## Get a jump on next season by overwintering frost-tender plants

Did you fall in love with a new coleus cultivar? Or are you simply tired of paying top dollar for your favorite double-flowered, variegated pink Impatiens? Did you think about overwintering your favorites indoors by making cuttings this Fall to propagate tender perennials--and help your thumb stay green while the snow flies.

Garden Flowers that make the cut: Try these to save time and money next year: fibrous-rooted begonias; coleus; fuchsias; impatiens; zonal, ivy and scented geraniums (Pelargonium); and Plectranthus spp. and cultivars, including Swedish ivy.

Plants that you cannot save: Real annuals flower that set seed in a single season, such as cosmos and sunflowers--are not suitable for propagation by cuttings. Nor are tender perennials like petunias and marigolds). At the end of the season, just put these onto the compost heap.

Here are 10 great ways to get the most out of your garden.

1. Make cuttings from strong plants. They will only be as good as the parent plants. Remember they should be strong and completely free from any signs of disease or insect infestation.
2. Summer or early autumn is the ideal time to take tip cuttings. Select a supple, young stem and remove any flower buds. Using a sharp, sterile knife, cut the branch eight to 12 centimetres below the growing tip, just beneath a leaf node. Each plant will yield six to eight tip cuttings.
3. Once you've made all the cuttings, remove the leaves from the lower half of each stem. Make three or four vertical slits, about 1.5 centimetres long and one to two millimetres deep, at the base of each cutting. Helps rooting.
4. Carefully dip the bases into a rooting hormone containing IBA (indolebutyric acid). A light dusting is sufficient--too much will cause the cuttings to rot.
5. Add to the containers with a sterile, soilless mixture formulated for cuttings and starting seeds.
6. Plant the cuttings into the mix five centimeters deep & spaced eight centimetres apart. Place pots in an area with sunny spot, but out of direct sunlight, and keep the soil evenly damp.
7. After about five weeks, each cutting will have developed lots strong roots; move cuttings into their own small pots.
8. In another one to two weeks, signs of new growth will be noticeable; relocate plants to a bright, sunny window. Once a month, fertilize cuttings with a dilute solution high in phosphorus; Fertilize African violet food (0-12-0). Keep room temperatures cool over winter--between 10 and 15°C is ideal--and allow plants to dry out between waterings.
9. If cuttings become leggy, pinch them back to encourage bushy growth, and increase light levels using grow lights or fluorescent tubes.
10. By late spring, you will have a crop of healthy, young plants identical to those available at your local nursery. After all danger of frost has passed, harden off plants by moving them to a protected, partly sunny area of the garden. Keep plants well watered for two to three weeks and feed at half-strength with a fertilizer formulated for flowering plants (such as 15-30-15). Transplant the rooted cuttings into your garden as you would any other annual.

### About the Author

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