

Using stem cuttings to make container plants

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Volunteer restoration groups on a budget appreciate being able to grow their own container plants. Did you know that there is also a good biological principle behind propagation from cuttings? San Diego is home to a wide variety of plant communities with varying environmental conditions. The resident plant populations have adapted to the particular sites over years of natural selection. Plants from your particular area may be more suited to it than plants of the same species from miles away.

Cuttings are an easy way to propagate plants for many species, especially those with difficult-to-germinate seeds. The process is low in labor and can be successful in the corner of a residential back yard. Keeping notes on which species work for you will help other people.

To grow plants from cuttings:

- Prepare common 1-gallon or 5-gallon size pots by filling with soil and soaking thoroughly. If soil is hard to wet, place the pot in a bowl of water overnight, then let drain.
- Get permission from the property owner before taking samples. Removal of a small number of stems will not hurt a plant.
- Cut a stem about one to two feet long.
- Remove all the leaves, which will otherwise desiccate the cutting
- Push the cut end into the soil all the way to the bottom, leaving two nodes above the soil.
- Place the pots in filtered sunlight (for example, under a tree or a shade cloth)
- Sprinkle the pots every three days or so.
- By the end of a month, the cutting will be sprouting new leaves, or it will be clearly dead. If dead, toss it and reuse the pot for a new cutting.
- Once the plant has a number of new leaves and is growing well, plant it in your restoration site.

Species that are fairly easy to propagate from cuttings:

<i>Sambucus mexicana</i>	Blue Elderberry
<i>Epilobium</i> sp.	California fuchsia
<i>Salix</i> sp.	Willow
<i>Baccharis salicifolia</i>	Mulefat
<i>Pluchea serricea</i>	Arrow weed
<i>Populus fremontii</i>	Western Cottonwood
<i>Populus basalmifera</i> ssp. <i>trichocarpa</i>	Black Cottonwood
<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	Mugwort

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