PROPAGATION - NEW BEGINNINGS

There are few areas of indoor/outdoor gardening as limitless and rewarding as propagation. Propagation basically means "the multiplying of plants". There are two methods of plant increase; seeds (sexual) and vegetative (asexual). Propagation can lend a new beginning to a favourite plant that may be unhealthy, overgrown or that you may want to share with a friend.

SEEDS
Seeds are a convenient method of raising large numbers of plants. Seeds allow for greater diversity within the species because of the two parents genetic contributions. Often times plants from seeds take longer to mature (as in the case of bulbs, fruit trees and shrubs) so it can be slow but gratifying in the end.

CUTTINGS
Vegetative methods involve isolating a portion of the plant (stem, leaf, root, etc.) and inducing them to grow into new individuals. This is the "chip off the old block" method, where new plants are exact copies of the parent.

SUCKERS
Some plants produce suckers. These are shoots that come directly from the root (often a small distance from the plant). Suckers are easily lifted, severed with a sharp knife and replanted into fresh potting soil. These new suckers, also called pups or offsets will root quickly in the potting soil, providing you with a healthy clone in short order.

PLANTLETS
Plants such as strawberries and spider plants produce plantlets. These are tiny versions of the parent plants on slender stems which occur above ground (runners) and below ground (offsets). These little ones may be severed and replanted, and will also root quickly, even in a glass of water.

RHIZOMES AND TUBERS
Among plants with modified underground stems there are rhizomes and tubers. Often mistaken for roots they are thick and fleshy. Rhizomes such as iris may be divided into sections, each with at least one bud. Tubers like potatoes may be cut up into sections with each piece having an "eye" (buds which produce green and root growth) and planted to grow new plants.

BULBS
Bulbs and corms produce small replicas of themselves at their base. (Hyacinths produce bulblets, Gladioli corms produce cormels). These tiny bulbs may be planted and will mature to the flowering stage in 2-4 years. Bulbs may be cut cross-wise across their base to induce production of bulblets. Lilies may be propagated in several ways. Some lilies produce pea-size "bulbuls" at their leaf axels, where the base of the leaf joins the stem. Bulbuls may be potted and grown into new lily plants. One can also break off the individual scales from a lily bulb and plant them to produce more lily plants.

CUTTINGS
Cuttings may be taken from a variety of areas, leaf, stem, root, etc. One may use the entire leaf (African Violet) or sections of the leaf (Streptocarpus). Sections of the stem are used to propagate yucca and dracaena. Tip cuttings involve taking a 3-6 inch slip of new growth.

LAYERING
Layering is a most reliable means of propagation. It involves inducing stems to root when they are still attached and sustained to the parent plants. Ordinary layering is done by bending a shoot down, securing it with a peg or hoop and covering the area nearest the stem with soil. It may take a year before the rooted shoot is ready for transplanting. Tip layering is the simplest form of layering. It involves burying the tips of firm young shoot to root them, blackberries propagate well this way. Air layering has been used, possibly for thousands of years on plants that are otherwise extremely difficult to root. It involves bringing a rooting medium (sphagnum moss) to a branch that has been given a cut.