

Try air layering your houseplants

If your houseplants have developed a "leggy look" through loss of their lower foliage, try air layering.

This is a method of plant propagation used on plants which do not offer much success when making rooted cuttings in the conventional way.

Air layering is believed to have been developed centuries ago by the Chinese and it was no doubt introduced into North America by the early settlers.

Begin by making an upward cut into the stem of the plant, leaving a sliver of four centimetres to six centimetres (about two inches) attached.

Insert some wet sphagnum moss, and if available, treat with rooting hormone. Wrap the stem with wet sphagnum moss (about a handful), surround with polyethylene film, and tie both ends with string. Be sure that the moss does not dry out.

After the new roots have penetrated the moss ball (two to 10 weeks, depending on the species) and are visible on all sides, the rooted branch may be removed from the parent plant. The plastic should be removed and the rooted cutting placed in a pot of soil.

To ensure success, cover the newly-potted cutting with plastic to prevent desiccation during its first week.

Once the plant is established, remove the plastic.

Air layering is common and useful for rooting ornamental indoor plants such as Benjamin figs, rubber plants, Dieffenbachia, and woody plants like azaleas.

Poisonous Plant Booklet

That beautiful dieffenbachia plant in your living room or the hanging English ivy in your kitchen could be a potential source of poisoning.

Toxic plants surround us daily in our homes offices and gardens. Yet when we think of accidental poisoning of children, we usually suspect medicines or cleaning aids.

But hospitals say they're quizzed more about plants than any other poisonous substances. The poison information centre at the Hospital for Sick Children reports one out of every six calls is about problems caused by plants.

The centre, in conjunction with the Co-operators insurance company, has produced a pamphlet, *Your Guide to Poisonous Plants*, to help identify potential problems and resulting symptoms.

The booklet suggests you learn the common name of each plant you buy and keep it on a stick in the soil. Having the name handy can save time and trouble in case a child or pet happens to eat some of the plant.

The booklet lists house, garden and wild plants and their toxic parts and possible effects. It is available free from Sick Kids, health and poison control centres and all Co-operators offices.

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