

# Face lift a cure for some ailing plants

A face lift may be the cure-all when a hanging plant has turned from a beauty into a beast. And, from this cosmetic surgery, baby plants can be born.

Propagation from stem cuttings is fun and easy. It's ideal for gift giving, exchanging, saving healthy parts of an ailing plant, or increasing collections. All that's needed is patience plus a little practice in greenery obstetrics.

As far as containers are concerned, anything goes. Just make sure they're clean and drainage holes can be put in the bottoms. Even disposable paper bathroom cups are useful for single occupants and roots won't be disturbed when upgrading is needed... just cut the cup away and repot.

Consider tin cans, or cut a milk carton in half for a "nursery of newborns." You might even try a



## GREEN 'N' GROWING

Elaine Gordon

clear plastic food bag with growing medium at the base... just blow into it to inflate the bag and secure with a twist-tie after planting.

Snip a four-inch length of stem, keep at least three leaves on top and remove the lowest foliage. Make a hole (a potato skewer is handy) in, for example, a medium of 1/3 sterilized potting soil to 2/3 vermiculite or perlite. Chances of success are greater if the stem

is dipped in a rooting hormone powder to increase root production.

Insert the cutting to half its length in the hold and gently tamp the medium to hold the stem upright. Apply room temperature water, never cold. Cuttings can be propagated in water, but some plants rooted in this way often find it difficult adjusting to soil.

A simple way to provide humidity is to cover the plant with a

clear plastic food bag secured at the top or pot rim. To prevent the bag from coming in contact with foliage, insert three swivel sticks, straws, or a U-shape wire frame. This mini-greenhouse is a good, temporary sick bay for plants with the doldrums, too.

Clear objects like an inverted drinking glass or jar resting on the medium could be useful as well. Consider a cake cover lid or an aquarium for covering a family of pots.

Set in a warm, bright spot out of direct sun. If a lot of condensation appears, open the bag for a few minutes daily to help clear the excess.

Rooting times vary, so after several weeks, gently tug at the cutting and if it resists, roots have formed. Slit one side of the bag or slightly prop up the bottom of the

cover for a few days before discarding. This helps the "baby" become acclimatized to a normal environment. When enough roots have grown to support growth, carefully remove and pot up.

Multiplying African Violets from a leaf cutting (a leaf with its stem attached) isn't difficult either. Just cut a healthy leaf from the centre row, not the older bottom row, and dip the end in rooting hormone powder before inserting into medium at a 45-degree angle. Make sure most of the stalk is covered.

Water and set under plant lights or in a bright spot without sun. Keep damp. New plantlets will form at the base of the leaf and when they are "Tom Thumb" size, gently separate from the "mother" leaf and pot up.

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