

Keep Up the
Good Work



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One of my first horticulture experiences involved my grandparents and a sandbox. They appropriated my sandbox – I guess I'd outgrown it, if that's possible. It was in a sunny garden area beside their house. I thought their yard was a magical place. Tall pine trees provided all the straw they could ever use as mulch and gave a cathedral like presence to the whole property.

My grandparents were old school gardeners. There were a few nurseries to buy plants from in Columbia in the early fifties, but they had 2 acres. They needed a lot of plants, so I guess their plan was to take cuttings and root them. The sandbox was a perfect medium to propagate azaleas, camellias, and gardenias. The sandbox cuttings were covered with old window sashes which could be lifted and propped up if it was sunny and left down at night or on cloudy days. Dear Lew, my grandfather, was an architect, so they were probably recycled from someone's house renovation project.

We aren't born knowing how to grow plants. Some people may have green thumbs, but gardening is a life skill that can, and needs to be, cultivated. If you're lucky, you have a good teacher, or maybe several, as has happened in my case. Even though I don't have his garden journal, I'm pretty sure Dear Lew kept one. He was that kind of person, very meticulous and tidy. I also surmise that someone(s) taught him how and when were the best times to take those cuttings.

Flash forward to 1988. I was taking a plant propagation class at TCL, working on an Associate degree in Horticulture, and the instructor was showing us how to take hardwood and soft wood cuttings. A Eureka moment when the light bulb came on in my grey matter, deep in my genes I remembered the sandbox. Pulling on the little cuttings and when they pulled back.

Plant Propagation is equal parts art, science, and timing. Just as in comedy and romance, timing



is crucial. There are certain times of year when we take cuttings. Some of it may have to do with naturally occurring rooting hormones or plant maturation. Another important consideration is sanitation, exactly like today. Start with clean

tools, healthy plants, and seeds. We sanitize work surfaces and use sterilized containers and potting soil. Depending on the type of plant or seed there may be an optimum temperature, light or shade which factor into the success of germination and rooting.

I have been studying horticulture for decades, with both failures and successes (probably more failures). However, in reality it's all success, because gardening is a metaphor of life. I've experienced hope, anticipation, fruit, flower, decay and death. Benefitted from music, aerobic exercise, sunlight, rain, and dirt. Living plants support all the life on the planet. Let's do our part to enjoy and celebrate the humus, birds, bees, butterflies and worms. Keep up the good work and enjoy your corner of nature, big or small. Be All In, Be Alive, Be Happy. Celebrate every day as Earth Day.