

## Propagating New Plants

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A challenge to all propagators is to receive unfamiliar plants. During the past year, I received these three plants and was told, "see what you can do with these".

The four plants were *Michelia figo*, *Erythrina ×bidwillii*, *Pedilanthus tithymaloides*, and *Indigofera kirilowii*. Each presented its own challenges. The first step is to research each plant, where it originates, growth habits, and environmental requirements. The second step is to observe the plant's growing habits (e.g., whether truly evergreen or semievergreen, when it flowers, and stages of growth) in your area. The rooting hormones used are Hormodin #1 and a solution of Dip 'N Grow and water at a ratio of 1 to 20.

The first plant *Michelia figo* or ornamental banana is an evergreen shrub belonging to the magnolia family. It is only hardy to Zone 8. The stem is fleshy, with waxy medium-size leaves with close internodal lengths. It is an excellent candidate for liquid treatment. With sufficient water and adequate drainage, the stems rooted in 3 weeks with few loses.

The second plant, *Erythrina ×bidwillii* (hybrid coral beauty), is hardy to Zone 10 to 11, a member of the Fabacea family, and a coarse-textured plant that produces showy red flowers. The stems are quite fibrous and have solid white pith while the new growth is still quite young. When new growth is only 3 inches long and the tips begin to elongate and internodal length is relatively short, the cuttings should be taken. The cutting should have at least two-leaf nodes, one to expose the leaf scar and the other to remain. After trying powder on group Number 1 and liquid on group Number 2, the powder had the greater success. The powder initialized rooting along the treated portion of the stem. The liquid treatment did produce some rooting but stem rot took its toll.

The third plant, *Pedilanthus tithymaloides*, is a succulent native to the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South America. The common name is devil's backbone or Jacob's ladder. The foliage structure is architecturally interesting. The flowers are small cherry-red bracts about ½ inch long. These cuttings can be dipped in liquid or powder and set under mist.

The fourth plant, *Indigofera kirilowii* or Chinese indigo, is a deciduous shrub of 3 ft tall with rose-colored flowers. It is hardy to Zone 5. With its compound leaf structure, the new growth is a bright green and ⅛ inch in diameter. The first group dipped in powder took 2 weeks to root. The second group with liquid treatment calloused in 2 weeks but took another week to root sufficiently. Group 1 kept its leaflets better and had less stem rot loses. Both groups needed extra mist in order to keep their leaves but Group 1 was able to withstand the additional moisture better than Group 2.

I suspect with cooler temperatures the liquid would work as well as powder but the new growth is not sufficiently developed until late May to early June with flowers shortly thereafter. The second flush is ready in midsummer when outside temperatures are 90 to 98°F, and are particularly pithy when long enough for cutting.

Getting new plants for propagation is always a challenge. Whether one has years of experience or is a novice, it is something we can all look forward to.