

Growing New Trees and Fruit Bushes from Cuttings.



Many plants will grow quite easily from cuttings, and it's a great way to get new plants without having to break the piggy bank.

One of the easiest is willow, and we have grown this from cuttings in many different places at Windmill Community Gardens. It's a great one for beginners and children because if you just poke a stick in the ground, it is likely to grow, so we call them our "magic wands"! The young willow stems come in many colours, so the cuttings can look really decorative.

Cuttings from red and golden willows.



Cuttings from green willows.



We take the cuttings in late Winter, before the buds on the plant start to make leaves. As with all cuttings, you need to ensure that it goes in the ground with the base of the cutting on the bottom. With most plants, if you get it wrong they will fail - but with willow, it might still work as they are so willing to root, but still not as well. Fortunately, it's easy to see which way is up, as the buds on the stem all point upwards.

Use a pair of clean and sharp secateurs for the best results. Cuttings of 30 - 40cm in length and about the thickness of a pencil are ideal. Give them an angled cut on the top, just above a bud if you can, as any wood above the top bud is likely to die back and can provide a place for rotting to start. Putting the angle on the top cut also helps show which is the top and in theory helps the cutting to shed the water (if it stays upright!).



Black mulberry willow - note slanted top cuts next to a bud

Plant the cuttings between half and two-thirds into moist ground and firm them in. Technically, you should place them in a weed-free area which you can keep an eye on to stop weeds competing with them later in the year. We use old builder's bags as planters, which helps to stop us forgetting where they are, but we tend to plant them and pretty much leave them to it, unless the weeds are really strangling them. You should water if the soil gets dry, but adding mulch will help to stop this happening. The cuttings should sprout in Spring, so you can then keep an eye on the leaves to look for signs of moisture stress. If they still have leaves at the end of Summer, you should have a rooted cutting. Leave the cuttings in place until late Winter, then pot them up individually or plant where you want them to grow. Water well for the first year.



Black mulberry, gold and red willow cuttings ready to grow.

Cuttings from soft fruit bushes like gooseberries, black, white and red currants will also grow well from cuttings. Again, we take these in late Winter, when we are pruning the fruit bushes anyway, and when the plants are dormant. Last year's cuttings rooted really well, so we now have lots of new plants, ready to be planted out or for sale. These can be a good money-spinner if you need to raise funds for your school garden.



Blackcurrant and gooseberry plants grown last year from cuttings.