

Rooting Epiphytic Cactus Cuttings in Arizona

Leo A. Martin

Epiphytic cacti come from tropical areas with high rainfall, or frequent dews or mists. Many are from always-damp rain forests or cool cloud forests, while others experience strict dry seasons. Most grow on tree limbs in partial to full shade, but a few grow on rocks in full sun, though they won't take Arizona sun.

Some are easy to grow here: *Acanthocereus*, *Deamia*, *Selenicereus*. Take a four inch cutting, lay sideways and press into barely-moist, coarse and rapidly-draining soil during warm weather and stand back.

Others can be challenging. These don't like high night temperatures and prefer more humidity than we can offer. *Rhipsalidopsis* (Easter cactus) are especially hard to grow here. I haven't had much success despite trying several times. Rooting these difficult epiphytes can be especially troublesome. Since reading a tip in *The Amateur's Digest*, I have been experimenting with rooting in water with good results.

I'm talking about:

- Epiphyllum species and hybrids - jungle and seasonally dry tropical forest
- *Disocactus* (Not *Discocactus*), *Lepismium*, *Rhipsalis*, *Hatiora* - jungle and cloud forest
- *Schlumbergera* (*Zygocactus*) (Christmas cactus) and *Rhipsalidopsis* (Easter cactus) species and hybrids (holiday cactus) - jungle and cloud forest

The standard way to root *Epiphyllum* cuttings is trouble as far as I'm concerned, and I haven't had much luck. One is supposed to take cuttings about four inches long, lay on a greenhouse bench until they shrivel slightly (about 1-2 weeks in California, but decidedly less here), plant upside down in dry, loose potting soil suitable for epiphytic orchids and cacti, place in a shady humid spot, leave dry for one week, water once, and then water regularly when normal growth resumes. For me the cuttings just dry up. If I try to water earlier, they rot.

It's the same with *Schlumbergera* hybrids. Mine are always dropping stem segments, and I've almost never been able to root them. After reading the article, I started putting them into small jars with just enough water to cover the bottom half of the bottom stem segment. Baby food jars would work well. The trick is to get cuttings to stand up in the jar, for if they fall over and are completely submerged, they rot. I put them outside in full shade, on the kitchen windowsill, or in a bathroom with a skylight. Guess what: At least 2/3 root! I pot them up and they grow.

Next, I tried this with *Rhipsalis* cuttings. I had the same success, including *R. pachyphylla*, which is supposed to be hard to grow. I haven't tried with *Epiphyllum* but it is supposed to work. Now, when I buy one of these plants, I immediately take a cutting and start to root it, in case I kill the plant I bought.

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Marina Welham, Editor
8591 Lochside Drive
Sydney BC Canada V8L 1M5
amatrdigest@coastnet.com
<http://www.theamateursdigest.com>