

Root Pruning and Air Layering

(Information from the November 6, 2018 RCMGA Continuing Education Meeting)

Root Pruning

- Used when moving trees and shrubs.
- Increases the chance of success by minimizing transportation shock. Root pruning creates more feeder roots close to the trunk.
- Pruning roots encourages the growth of new feeder roots in the area that will be removed with the root ball.
- Done one or multiple times prior to moving plant. For a plant that will be moved in November, root prune in March and maybe one or two more times. Or, root pruning done in November can be transplanted in February. In either case, the plant must be kept well-watered.
- Using a shovel, cut to shovel depth through existing roots at the plant's drip line all the way around. Feeder roots are in the upper 18 to 24 inches of soil.

Air Layering

There is an excellent HGIC Fact Sheet that has instructions and photos to instruct on air layering at <https://hgic.clemson.edu/hot-topic/air-layering/>.

- Vegetative propagation for leggy houseplants like rubber plants, crotons, and dieffenbachia and for woody ornamentals like azalea, camellia, magnolia, oleander, and holly.
- If done in the spring (February/March), use shoots from the previous year; if done in mid- or late summer, use shoots from the current season's growth.
- Use a branch that is pencil-size or slightly larger.
- Using a disinfected knife, make two parallel incisions between nodes, about 1.5 inches apart, then make a slit between the two.
- Remove the bark and scrape away the cambium (green) layer.
- Rooting hormone can be applied but is not necessary.
- Cover the area with sphagnum moss that has been soaked and wrung out till it's damp.
- Pack the moss closely around the open area.
- Cover with plastic wrap to prevent the moss from drying out and secure each end with twist-ties or electrician's tape.
- If the branch is in the sun, cover the plastic wrap with aluminum foil to slow down drying.
- Check periodically – more frequently if in the sun.
- If the moss is beginning to dry, moisten it again. Remember that it should be moist. If it's too wet, it will make the branch susceptible to disease.
- Once roots are seen in the moss, prune the piece with roots and moss off at the bottom.
- Plant into a container, keeping moss on the roots and keep it well-watered and out of direct sun.