

Instant bonsai: successfully rooting very woody grapevine cuttings[©]

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At the beginning of March, 2014, I was given access to some rather old grape vines that were going to be removed for road work on Highway 152 just west of Gilroy, California. After digging down for 2 ft. before finding any roots at all, I realized I would not be able to dig and move them by hand. I consulted with a friend who had been creating bonsai for many years and, with his advice, I decided to try rooting the picturesque growth at the tips of the vines that had been created by 40 years of pruning for wine grape production.

After pruning off all but two or three leaf nodes from the previous year's growth, I used a bow saw with a new blade to cut off sections with growing tips, from 8 to 10 in. long for the smaller pieces and 12 to 18 in. long for the larger ones. The diameter of the cuts ranged from 2 to 3 in. I dusted the cuts with a little rooting hormone (probably Hormex #3) then stuck these cuttings into qt- or gal-sized containers. I used my regular potting soil lightened with extra perlite. The cuttings were so top-heavy I had to wedge assorted rocks between the trunk and the sides of the pots to keep them upright.

The containers went into a 40% shade house and were kept moist, not wet. Within a month, most of the vines had started to leaf out. Finally, at the end of May I couldn't wait any longer and tipped one of the plants out of the pot. I was delighted to find that it was well-rooted.

All in all, I had about an 85-90% success rate. Some of the plants took considerably longer to root, closer to 4 or even 5 months. I think the success rate was high because I made the cuttings just as the leaf buds were starting to swell. I have spoken with others who tried similar techniques, but in the autumn, and had little to no success rooting their cuttings.



Figure 1. Gallon-sized container, 14 in. above soil, 2.5 years after cutting.

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