An Experiment in Rose Propagation by Semi-hardwood Cuttings

Propagation of heritage roses from cuttings obtained from 'Barbara's Garden', Rookwood Necropolis.

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In the past I have always propagated roses using hardwood cuttings from winter prunings. I would put them in a shady part of the garden and ignore them. Often the labels would disappear and I never knew what was what until they flowered. My success rate was about 30%. After a garden visit during the Heritage Roses New Zealand Conference in November 2024 and discussion with those who run the HRNZI National Register, I was persuaded by some very successful rose propagators to try semi-hardwood cuttings in Autumn.

Having read numerous different methods of semi-hardwood rose propagation and watching MANY YouTube videos on the subject, as well as consulting with other members of HRIA, I decided to undertake an experiment using some of the methods said to work readily. I used **Champneys' Pink Cluster**, a Noisette, which I have always found to be easy to strike via hardwood cuttings. I live in a subtropical climate so I am not sure if this has an impact on success rates.

I took semi-hardwood cuttings from branches that had already flowered as this seemed to be the consensus. I took them on 13th February 2026. I took cuttings of about 20 cm (8 inches) long, that were still flexible and left a few leaves at the top. I cut just below a leaf node. I used a rooting hormone gel.

I undertook the following trial using five different options. I put six cuttings in each option. The mediums were moistened only *(see below)*.

- Plastic pot of potting mix and perlite.
- Terracotta pot with potting mix and perlite. I used terracotta as I thought this would keep the roots drier and prevent the cutting rotting, which I have found to be a problem in the past.
- Sawdust.
- River sand.
- Zip lock bag containing a 50/50 mix of potting mix and perlite.

I placed the four pots in a lidded storage tub to maintain humidity as there seems to be consensus on this point. I placed the storage tub underneath the nursery bench in partial shade.
The zip lock bag was placed in semi shade.



Storage tub on 19th March, 5 weeks later.
Note leaves falling off the pot with river sand (pot on left).



Zip lock bag option

On the 20th March, 5 weeks after taking cuttings, roots were seen in the zip lock bag. Six weeks later the cuttings in river sand and sawdust had died.

On 14th April, two months after the experiment began, all remaining cuttings were potted up. Only one rooted cutting remained in both of the storage tub pots (plastic and terracotta) and 4 remained of the zip lock bag method. I have also been using the zip lock bag method for other cuttings taken at Rookwood on 1st April. I put all these cuttings in the refrigerator wrapped in newspaper to get the callus forming. I thought this would prevent rot of the cutting. At the same time I also put fresh cuttings of Champneys Pink Cluster in the fridge.

All of these cuttings were placed in zip lock bags after the bases had callused over. Some took two weeks and some took three weeks

In comparing **Champneys' Pink Cluster** using the fridge preparation method followed by the zip lock bag method I did not find any difference in success rate or speed of rooting.

The zip lock bag method has been very successful for Champneys Pink Cluster (60%) in the experiment as opposed to 16% in the pots.

The strike rate of the Rookwood roses in zip lock bags varied by type (about 20% strike rate with most, although **Isabella Sprunt** and **George Whatson**, both Teas, had the highest rates of success (about 50%).

I feel it would be better to take the cuttings earlier in the season – at least February – as this gives the cutting time to root, shoot and get some growth before winter dormancy. Not all types of roses root quickly. The teas and noisettes are fastest and more successful for me. Some of the other types that have not been successful may root better in the ground as hardwood cuttings.

In conclusion, I am sold on the zip lock bag method of rose propagation for semi hardwood cutting taken in early Autumn. I now have about 35 roses which will be given to the Sydney Group to add to or replace roses in Barbara's Garden at Rookwood or used as fund raisers. These are "George Whatson", **Isabella Sprunt**, 'Rookwood's Sanguinea', 'Serratipetala – in commerce as', "Mystery of Rookwood" (Hybrid Perpetual), "Bird Children" and, of course, **Champneys' Pink Cluster** which is the rose in the feature photo.

Some of the roses featured above – mostly photographed growing in 'Barbara's Garden,

Unless otherwise acknowledged, these roses have been photographed by Susan Wade.

Photo: Andrew Ross



'Serratipetala – in commerce as'
Hybrid China



Champneys' Pink Cluster
Noisette



"George Whatson"
Tea



Isabella Sprunt
Tea



'Rookwood's Sanguinea'
China



"Mystery of Rookwood"
Hybrid Perpetual

Photo: Glennis Clark