Optimal propagation conditions of *Mussaenda* in Barbados

By

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Introduciton

*Mussaenda* is a popular ornamental plant that has great market potential in Barbados. There are four different cultivars currently found in Barbados, which are pink (*M. philippica* ‘Doña Luz’), white (*M. philippica* ‘Doña Aurorea’), red (*M. erythrophylla* ‘Ashanti Blood’) and yellow (*Pseudomussaenda flava*). It is known as a difficult-to-root genus, and stem-cuttings are recommended for commercial propagation of *Mussaenda*.

Objectives

Our goal was to develop a system to commercially propagate different colors of *Mussaenda* so as to respond to the market demands in Barbados. To achieve this, we tried to determine the most efficient and effective stem-cutting propagation method for each cultivar. We evaluated whether rooting hormone and basal wounding treatments could affect rooting, compared two growth media (sand or a peat mixture), and determined which type of stem cutting was most effective (softwood, semi-hardwood, or hardwood).

Methods

160 cuttings were taken for each cultivar, including 40 softwood cuttings (each about 8 cm long), 60 semi-hardwood cuttings (12 cm) and 60 hardwood cuttings (16 cm). Two growth media were tested: half of the cuttings were planted in the NCC’s sand medium, and the other half were planted in a peat mixture we made with 70% peat, 20% compost, and 10% perlite. Rooting powder with 0.3% IBA was used on one group of 10 cuttings for each wood type, and rooting powder plus basal wounding treatment was conducted on groups of 10 semi-hardwood and hardwood cuttings, both in sand and peat media.

Results

*M. philippica* ‘Doña Luz’ cuttings turned out to perform better in the sand
medium. There was also a correlation between the type of wood and rooting success - softwood cuttings had the longest and most abundant roots, while hardwood cuttings did not root well in either medium. Rooting powder and basal wounding did not significantly positively affect cuttings. For pink Mussaenda, a total of 45/160 cuttings rooted.

*M. erythrophylla* cuttings had similar rooting results in peat and sand growth media. Softwood cuttings rooted much better than cuttings of the other two wood types. Rooting powder increased rooting success significantly in all three wood types, and basal wounding treatments on semi-hardwood and hardwood cuttings had positive effect on rooting. For red Mussaenda, a total of 20/160 cuttings rooted.

*New shoots (left) and new roots (right) from Mussaenda*

*Pseudomussaëda flava* had the most successful rooting in the peat medium with an impressive rooting rate of 50%, yet only 3.8% rooted in sand medium. Softwood cuttings with rooting powder in the peat had the most successful result (80% rooted, root length 8 cm). Hardwood cuttings with rooting powder and basal wounding had a 70% rooting rate and the longest root was 6.6 cm. Rooting powder and basal wounding helped the rooting process to a certain degree. For yellow Mussaenda, a total of 43/160 cuttings rooted.

*M. philippica* ‘Doña Aurorea’ proved to be the hardest-to-root. None of the cuttings in sand rooted and only 4 cuttings in all rooted in peat. Although some new buds and leaves grew on the cuttings, most of them are did not root. The 2 rooted softwood cuttings had much more and longer roots than the 2 rooted hardwood cuttings but these small sample sizes are not definitive.

**Conclusion**

For future propagation of both red and pink Mussaenda at the NCC, we recommend that softwood cuttings be used and treated with 0.3% IBA rooting powder and planted in sand. For yellow Mussaenda, use softwood cuttings treated with rooting powder and plant into a peat-based mixture. As for the hardest-to-root white Mussaenda, we suggest mound layering as a possible alternative means of raising the survival rates and rooting of cuttings.

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