

Don't Pack Vermiculite

When sticking cuttings in vermiculite don't pound the vermiculite around the cuttings. (Vermiculite also called Zonclite or Terra-Lite. See New York State Flower Growers Bulletins 13 and 14.) This completely destroys the structure of the vermiculite and the resulting product is mush. It then becomes completely saturated with water and no or very little oxygen reaches the base of the cutting.

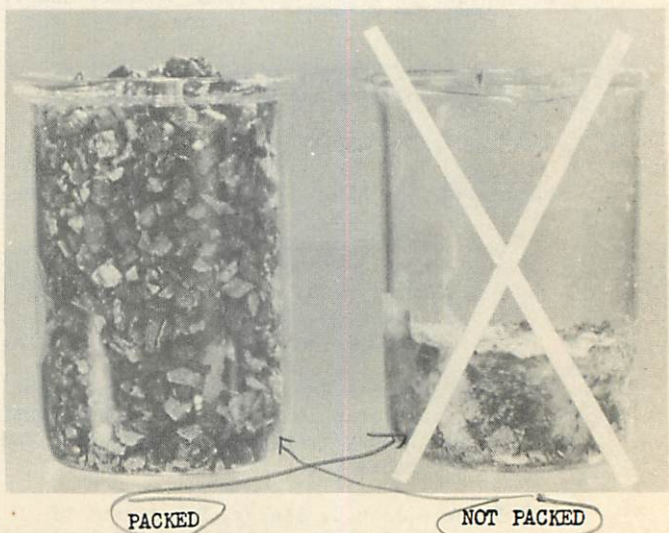
Lack of oxygen at the base results in rotting of the cuttings even though no rot-producing organisms are present.

Two growers recently informed us that the vermiculite was no good for rooting cuttings. They had both stuck their fall crop of geraniums in vermiculite and lost them all with rot. We checked their method and found they had packed the vermiculite around the cuttings with a hammer and board the same as when using sand.

The great advantage in vermiculite is the porosity, the high water holding capacity and excellent capillary movement of water. The porosity permits air to move through the media freely and supplies oxygen to the base of the cuttings. The great water holding capacity makes it necessary to water less frequently than when sand is used. The excellent capillary movement of water replaces the water at the base of the cutting rapidly after it is absorbed by the cutting.

The excellent capillary movement of water makes it unnecessary to pack the media around the cutting. The coarseness of particles might lead you to believe the water would not move readily to the cutting but there is always enough contact between these coarse particles to permit good water movement to the base of the cutting.

Our method of sticking cuttings as suggested in previous issues of the bulletin is to raise the water table in the bench to flood the vermiculite, than stick the cuttings. No trench cutting or packing in after they are stuck. After sticking, the water table is lowered. This settles the material around the cuttings and leaves it in excellent contact with the bases of them.



Vermiculite the same amount.

Packing destroys structure and prevents aeration.

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If you don't have a water tight bed for automatic watering, stick the cuttings without cutting a trench; then water thoroughly from the surface. This settles the vermiculite and makes good contact for water movement to the base of the cuttings. Don't pound them in.

The same holds true when using the concrete aggregate (no. 2) for seeding purposes. Level it in the flat, water thoroughly, then plant the seeds and water again thoroughly.

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