

## GROWTH CHARACTERISTICS OF *DRACAENA MARGINATA* LAM.

*Dracaena marginata* Lam. is a tropical foliage plant that makes an excellent landscape specimen and house plant. This species is propagated by cuttings, and growth rate affects the amount of propagation material available over a period of time.

Specimens used for these experiments were mature *Dracaena marginata* plants 3 to 6 m in height. Data were recorded monthly on the increase in the length of the stem in cm, the number of nodes produced, the number of new leaves

unfurling, and the length of time a leaf remains on the terminal after it unfurls.

These same experiments were carried out with 30 cm single stemmed plants in 15 cm plastic pots containing a mix of 50% soil and 50% wood shavings. All experiments were run for a period of 8 months.

The results of these experiments indicate that the terminal stems of established plants of *Dracaena marginata* increase in length by an average of 0.9 cm each month. These plants produced an average of 3.4 nodes per month with a range of 0 to 12 nodes. Growth appears to be affected by the size of the branch, its proportion on the plant, and competition with other stems for nutrients and light. The stems unfurled between 0 and 16 leaves each month with an average of 5.2. The unfurling of leaves is controlled by the rate of growth of these leaves and not by the growth of the stem, except where rapid elongation of the internodes in the region of the furled cluster causes an increased tension on the outer leaves in the cluster.

The portion of the stem below the bulge produced by overlapping swollen leaf bases with leaves present varied from about 10 to 60 cm depending upon the size and vigor of the branch. An estimated average of 30 cm of leaf zone represents the display effect of most branches. Leaf abscission takes place throughout the year, and the individual stems seem to maintain a constant leaf to stem ratio.

The growth patterns of 30 cm single-stemmed terminal plants in 15 cm plastic pots were similar to that of the established plants. The stems averaged 1.8 cm of growth per month, and an average of 3.4 nodes were produced per month. These plants produced 5.2 new leaves per month, and leaves remained on the stem for an average of 175.7 days with a range of 59 to 243 days. These plants had an estimated average of 30 cm of leaf zone per stem. The plants in general were short, about 50 cm high, providing a very large leaf to stem ratio.

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