

PROPAGATION OF TEA BY SINGLE INTERNODE CUTTINGS IN PEATMOSS

The type of cutting employed consists of a leaf and the stem beneath it down to a point a little above the junction of the next leaf below with the stem. If a suitable stem is cut just above each leaf with a *sharp* knife such cuttings are readily obtained. The cut should not be very oblique. Very young leaves are undesirable as they wilt and rot; old leaves tend to drop off either during propagation or too early after planting out in the field. The maintenance of an adequate leaf surface is of importance and it is therefore very desirable to pay attention to this point. Fully mature leaves on green or *lightly* reddened stems are the best, and it is no disadvantage if the bud on the axil of the leaf has started to grow a little. If much growth has been produced, however, the tender shoot should be pinched back to the first fish leaf from the stem before planting.

The peatmoss (medium grade) is lightly beaten up to break up lumps and moistened for several days prior to pressing in the cuttings, so that it is thoroughly wet but not sodden. About six inches is a suitable depth in a box or bed; if in a box the cuttings may be covered with advantage by a sheet of glass. In any case arrangements should be made to prevent direct sunlight or even bright light reaching the cuttings. It is for this reason that the back of an airy verandah or similar structure is suitable. With rather less satisfactory results, cuttings may be rooted under shades of hessian or manna grass supported on wire netting instead of in boxes or beds under more sheltered conditions. The cuttings should be lightly moistened down every evening, or more frequently in very dry weather, *but the peatmoss must not be rendered sodden.*

The best time of the year in the South-West Zone is before the break of the South-West Monsoon. By its end the cuttings will have developed young roots and may be gradually hardened off prior to planting in the North-East Monsoon. Five to six months should be allowed for rooting and hardening off, when the plants can be lifted with a ball of peatmoss attached and planted either in baskets or bamboo pots, in a nursery for the production of stumps, or direct into a prepared plot. If the latter step is taken, the services of an experienced garden cooly are necessary in the early stages of establishment to prevent sunscorch, etc., as unless care is taken considerable loss may occur from this cause. The use of a heavy shade of cut grevillea foliage thinned daily after the first fortnight obviates this.

Once established, cuttings appear to grow equally as well as seedlings of the same age, but different clones exhibit very marked differences in ease and speed of rooting. These differences reach their full expression when sand is used as a rooting medium, but are less obvious, though still marked, when peatmoss is used.
