



Garden Tips

My White House Ivy

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by Sharon Epstein

Last November, I received a cutting of an ivy that had been propagated from one growing outside the doors of the White House. It's the common English ivy, *Hedera helix*, best known for its evergreen foliage and frequent use as a groundcover. I took it home and put it in water to root, but when six weeks later it had sprouted only one short, spindly root, I hopped on the internet to see if I was doing anything wrong.

I learned a few things: 1. Fresh water is key. (Good - I change the water every few days.) 2. Ivy needs to have bright but indirect light. (Moderately good - I needed to move it off the dining room table.) 3. Cuttings should be immediately placed in water to prevent air from getting into stems. (Not so good - when I got the cutting it had been out of water for a while.) 4. Stems should be 3 to 6 inches long with 3 or 4 nodes. (Not good at all - my cutting has two nodes.) It seems my ivy has some growing challenges.



Photo: Rachel Cobb
The American Ivy Society

In the search to aid my cutting, I came across a great website: www.ivy.org, the website of **The American Ivy Society**. It's full of useful information, including the 2012 Ivy of the Year, *Hedera helix* 'Henriette.' 'Henriette' is a miniature variegated ivy with white to creamy-white leaves that are splashed with dark-green, apple-green, yellow-green, and gray-green. Because of its small leaves, bright coloring and self-branching habit, it makes a lush, compact pot plant, hanging basket or groundcover for small areas. In cold weather the white or cream-colored portion takes on a pinkish hue.

The American Ivy Society has two interesting cultivation programs underway: One focuses on commercial growers testing ivies in greenhouse growing conditions, looking for the best ivies for baskets, pots, topiary and other commercial projects. The other program is in cooperation with public gardens across the country, testing for all types of outdoor hardiness, from cold tolerance in Montana to heat tolerance in Texas.

There's also plenty of help for the home gardener, including information on ivy care and where to purchase plants. If you email them a question for the Q & A section, it will be forwarded to a qualified member for response. Write to: info2@ivy.org. Make sure to put "ivy" in the subject.

As I said, my little cutting has some growing challenges to overcome. But I'll tend to it and nurture it and hope it survives, so one day I might have my own "White House cuttings" to give away.