



By Buzz Bertolero

The Dirt Gardener

I have an old Dracaena marginata that is tall and lanky. If I were to remove the top three

feet, would it develop side branches? If so, when would be the best time to do this?

Dracaena marginata will develop side shoots if you remove a section of the main leader. Many times, the side shoots develop naturally. You might consider saving the cast-off section and develop a new plant from it. It's not that difficult.

All you need to do is dip the cut end in a rooting hormone powder, available at your favorite garden center. It's then placed in potting soil, about six to eight inches deep. The rooting process takes several months. When rooted, you'll have a mature plant.

Another technique gardeners will use is to root the section while it is still attached to the main stem is called air layering.

You select a two- to three-inch-wide area on the main stem, score it with a knife, wrap it in moist sphagnum moss and cover the area with aluminum foil. In about six to eight weeks, the new roots should have formed. The section is then cut off below where the roots are forming and planted.

The remaining plant could be tossed away or you can wait for the new growth to develop.

Any of these plant-propagation techniques can be done any time of the year.

If you're impatient and can't wait, you can transplant the existing plant into a larger container with additional new plants. It is very common to have multiple plants in the same container. The original plant becomes instantly full by selecting two to three plants of varying heights to fill in the void.

The new plants could be other complementary varieties rather than *Dracaena marginata*. It's really an individual choice.

The lanky appearance is resolved as soon as the transplanting is completed.

Can you tell me if there is a difference between aluminum sulphate and soil sulphur? I believe they both help with the soil acidity by lowering the pH level. I'm growing blueberries so I need an acidic soil.

Aluminum sulphate and soil sulphur are both acidifiers. They are long-time, old-school products used for making alkaline soil acidic.

Depending on the date of the publication you're reading, one or the other is usually recommended.

Soil sulphur is applied in the late fall and winter months while aluminum sulphate can be applied during the growing season.

Aluminum sulphate is the active ingredient in two other acidifiers — True Blue or GreenAll pH adjuster. These products are easier to apply, as the instructions are written for the home garden.

Azaleas, camellias and rhododendrons, along with blueberries, all benefit from acidic soil.

Another use of aluminum sulphate is it turns pink and white hydrangeas blue.

The ideal pH for most plants is between 6.5 and 7.5. A pH test is run on a soil sample taken from several inches below the soil surface. A simple pH test is necessary to determine the correct amount to apply. Test kits are available at most garden centers.

Buzz Bertolero is Executive Vice President of Navlet's Garden Centers and a California Certified Nursery Professional. His web address is www.dirtgardener.com and you can send questions by email to dirtgarden@aol.com or to 360 Civic Drive, Ste. "D," Pleasant Hill, CA 94523, and on Facebook at [Facebook.com/Buzz-Bertolero](https://www.facebook.com/Buzz-Bertolero).