

# How to Propagate *Acaena pinnatifida*



## Propagating *Acaena pinnatifida*: A Guide to Cultivating the Piggy-back Plant

### Introduction:

*Acaena pinnatifida*, commonly known as the piggy-back plant, is a charming groundcover prized for its dense, low-growing habit, attractive foliage, and striking spiky seed heads. Native to New Zealand, its vibrant green leaves, often tinged with bronze, coupled with its tolerance of diverse conditions, have earned it a place in many gardens worldwide. While relatively easy to maintain once established, propagation can present some unique challenges. This guide explores various methods, outlining their feasibility and offering practical advice to aspiring cultivators.

### Seed Germination:

Currently, there are no known reliable methods for seed germination propagation of *Acaena pinnatifida*. While seeds are produced abundantly, germination rates are notoriously low, and success is largely unpredictable. Factors such as seed dormancy and the need for specific environmental conditions likely contribute to this difficulty. Further research into optimized germination techniques would be valuable for large-scale propagation and the preservation of genetic diversity.

### **Cuttings:**

Cuttings offer a more reliable method for propagating *Acaena pinnatifida*.

**Challenges:** Root development can be slow, requiring patience and consistent care. Using semi-hardwood cuttings gathered in late summer or early autumn generally provides the best results.

**Practical Tips:** Take cuttings approximately 10-15cm long, removing lower leaves to prevent rot. Dip the cut ends in a rooting hormone powder before planting in a well-draining propagating mix (e.g., a mixture of perlite and peat moss). Maintain high humidity using a propagator or by covering the cuttings with a plastic bag. Regular misting is crucial to prevent dehydration. Root formation typically occurs within 4-6 weeks.

**Rewards:** Cuttings offer a relatively quick method of producing genetically identical plants to the parent, preserving desirable traits. It's a reliable way to increase numbers of a specific cultivar.

### **Division:**

Division is arguably the easiest and most successful propagation method for *Acaena pinnatifida*.

**Challenges:** Mature plants need to be sufficiently large to

allow for division without significantly stressing the parent plant. Care must be taken to avoid damaging the roots during the process.

**Practical Tips:** The best time to divide is during spring or autumn. Dig up the mature plant carefully, and gently separate it into smaller clumps, ensuring each division has a healthy root system and several growth points. Replant the divisions immediately in a well-prepared site with adequate spacing.

**Rewards:** Division is quick, efficient, and consistently produces vigorous new plants. It's an ideal method for home gardeners aiming to expand their existing *Acaena pinnatifida* plantings.

### **Tissue Culture:**

Tissue culture is a technically demanding method not typically employed for home propagation of *Acaena pinnatifida*.

**Challenges:** This method requires specialized equipment, sterile conditions, and expertise in plant tissue culture techniques.

**Practical Tips:** This method is best suited for commercial nurseries or research facilities seeking to produce large quantities of disease-free plants or specific cultivars. Protocols would need to be developed specific to *Acaena pinnatifida*.

**Rewards:** Tissue culture enables mass propagation of uniform plants, eliminating the risk of disease transmission and allowing for rapid multiplication of superior genotypes.

### **Conclusion:**

Propagating *Acaena pinnatifida* presents unique challenges, with seed germination proving unreliable. Division offers the easiest and most dependable route for home gardeners, while cuttings provide a viable alternative. Tissue culture remains

a specialized technique best suited to commercial settings. Despite the hurdles, the rewards of cultivating this beautiful groundcover are undeniable. The satisfaction derived from successfully propagating *Acaena pinnatifida*, particularly through the more challenging methods, adds significantly to the joy of gardening. For beginners, starting with division is highly recommended, before eventually tackling the slightly more challenging method of cuttings. Don't be discouraged by initial setbacks; patience and careful attention to detail are key to success. The tenacious nature of this plant and the beauty of its mature form make the effort well worthwhile.