

# How to Propagate *Elaeagnus angustifolia*



## Propagating *Elaeagnus angustifolia*: The Russian Olive's Resilience and Propagation Challenges

*Elaeagnus angustifolia*, commonly known as Russian olive, is a remarkably adaptable and resilient deciduous tree or large shrub. Its silvery leaves, fragrant flowers, and attractive berries make it a popular choice among gardeners, particularly for erosion control and wildlife habitat creation. However, its propagation presents unique challenges, requiring a nuanced approach depending on the chosen method. While its vigorous growth suggests ease of propagation, success often hinges on understanding its specific requirements.

### **Seed Germination:**

Currently, there are no known reliable methods for seed germination propagation of *Elaeagnus angustifolia*. While seeds *can* germinate under ideal conditions, the success rate is

notoriously low and inconsistent. Factors such as dormancy periods and the need for specific environmental cues make this method unreliable for the average gardener. Therefore, relying solely on seed germination for propagating Russian olive is not recommended.

### **Cuttings:**

Cuttings offer a more reliable method for propagating *Elaeagnus angustifolia*. [Hardwood cuttings](#) taken in late autumn or winter, after leaf drop, have shown the best results.

**Challenges:** Root development can be slow and inconsistent. The success rate largely depends on the quality of the cutting material, proper rooting hormone application, and maintaining consistent humidity and temperature within the propagation environment.

**Practical Tips:** Use cuttings from healthy, mature plants. Apply a rooting hormone powder before inserting the cuttings into a well-draining, sterile rooting medium (e.g., a mixture of perlite and vermiculite). Maintain high humidity using a propagator or by covering the cuttings with a plastic bag. Place the cuttings in a warm location with indirect sunlight.

**Rewards:** Cuttings offer a relatively quick method to produce genetically identical plants, preserving desirable characteristics of the parent plant. It's a practical method for larger-scale propagation if done correctly.

### **Division:**

Division is viable for *Elaeagnus angustifolia*, particularly for smaller, established specimens.

**Challenges:** The roots of Russian olive can be quite extensive, making careful division essential to avoid damaging the plant. Improper division can lead to the death of both the parent plant and the divisions.

**Practical Tips:** The best time for division is in early spring or late autumn. Dig around the plant carefully to minimize root disturbance. Ensure each division has a sufficient root system and healthy shoots. Plant the divisions in well-prepared soil, providing adequate watering until they are established.

**Rewards:** Division is a simple and straightforward method, producing plants that mirror the characteristics of the parent plant. It's an ideal method for smaller plants needing to be moved or separated.

### **Tissue Culture:**

Tissue culture offers the possibility of large-scale propagation and disease-free plants.

**Challenges:** Tissue culture requires specialized equipment, a sterile environment, and expertise in plant tissue culture techniques. It is generally not a method suited for home gardeners.

**Practical Tips:** This method requires access to a laboratory setting and specialized knowledge. Sterile, aseptic techniques are paramount.

**Rewards:** Rapid multiplication of plantlets, eliminating diseases and producing uniform plants.

### **Conclusion:**

Propagating *Elaeagnus angustifolia* presents distinct challenges depending on the chosen method. While seed germination is currently unreliable, cuttings are a relatively successful and practical option for the home gardener. Division provides a simple avenue for smaller plants, but care must be taken to avoid damaging the root system. Tissue culture, although offering scalability, requires specialized expertise and resources. The reward lies in the successful

cultivation of these hardy and visually appealing plants. The satisfaction of nurturing a cutting into a thriving tree, or carefully dividing a mature plant, far outweighs the initial difficulties. Therefore, do not be dissuaded by the challenges; with careful attention to detail and the right approach, propagating *Elaeagnus angustifolia* can be a rewarding horticultural endeavor. Remember to select the method best-suited to your resources and experience.