Propagation of Mutisia decurrens, Cav.

BY

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With Plate XXVIII.

ALTHOUGH this plant has been known in cultivation for many years, it cannot be said that it is as widely grown as it might be. This is a great pity, for every one must admit that when well grown it forms a picture beautiful in any garden. Perhaps the chief reason for the comparative rarity of this plant in gardens is the impression that its propagation is difficult. But there is no difficulty if the right methods be adopted.

The usual practice is to take as cuttings young shoots as they appear above the ground and with them a piece of stolon is cut. In many cases such shoots may be obtained with roots already attached. This, however, is a crude method, and one which may result in damage to the parent plant. These shoots are those which produce the flowers. Every shoot of the kind that is removed means loss of so much flower. It is, therefore, essential to ensure a good supply of bloom that these shoots be allowed to remain on the parent plant. It has only to be known that portions taken from any part of the plant will give successful cuttings to put out of count this old wasteful method.

After the flowering season is over, that is to say after the end of August or the beginning of September, it may be found advisable to thin out some of the old flowering stems that have grown into a tangled mass. From these thinnings a supply of material suitable for cuttings may be obtained.

Perhaps the most successful method of striking these is as follows :—

Select a frame with a shady exposure and in it place one foot of drainage. Over this place some rough material such as leaves to prevent the drainage from becoming choked up, and finally a layer of pure sand, say about eight inches deep.

In preparing the cuttings it is not necessary that they should be cut beneath a node, but anywhere that is most

convenient. A suitable length for cuttings is from six to eight inches, and no leaves must be removed from them. When inserting the cuttings it is not advisable to make holes, but just press the basal end into the sand deep enough to enable the cutting to stand erect. This brings the lower portion into contact with the moist sand in such a manner as will promote immediate root growth.

After the cuttings are inserted a steady temperature of about 58° F. must be maintained. Water of the same temperature as that in the propagating frame should be given—using a fine rose—in liberal quantities at least once a day, or more frequently in bright weather. On warm, sunny days, or during drying winds, it will be found beneficial to water every hour from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The summit portion of a shoot roots more readily than does the basal portion, the reason being that the growing points have not yet become so woody and are thus in a better state for producing roots. If the older portions, however, are used, and the water supply kept up, they will root, although they may be a fortnight or three weeks later of doing so.

It is not advisable to leave the cuttings long in the sand after roots have commenced to form, but as soon as these are two to three inches long, the plants should be potted up. A suitable compost for potting consists of three parts loam and one part crock dust.

After potting, which must not be done too firmly, the plants should be placed back into the frame in which they were struck and receive a thorough watering. Water must then be withheld from the roots until the compost in the pots becomes somewhat dry, but in order to reduce transpiration and prevent flagging the foliage should be frequently lightly sprayed.

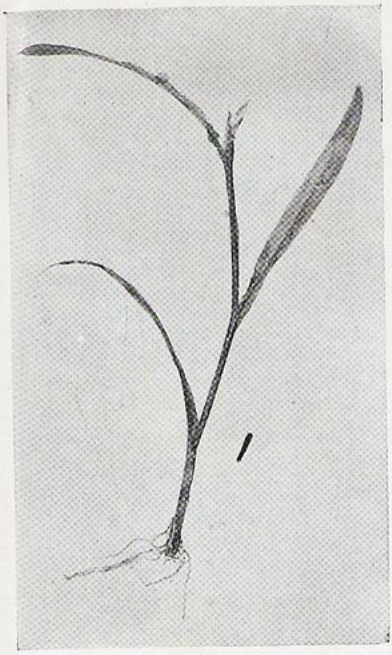
After an interval of about a week from the time of potting the roots of many of the cuttings will appear at the sides of the pots. These plants can then safely be removed to a cool house there to remain until they are required for planting in border or greenhouse.

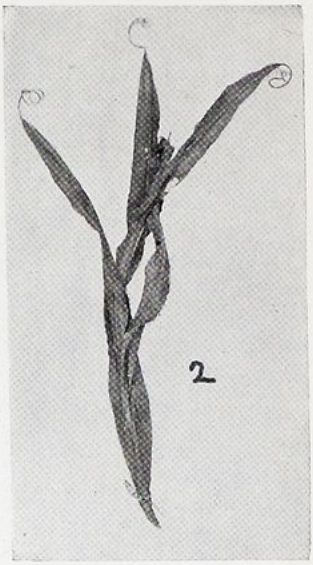
EXPLANATION OF PLATE XXVIII.

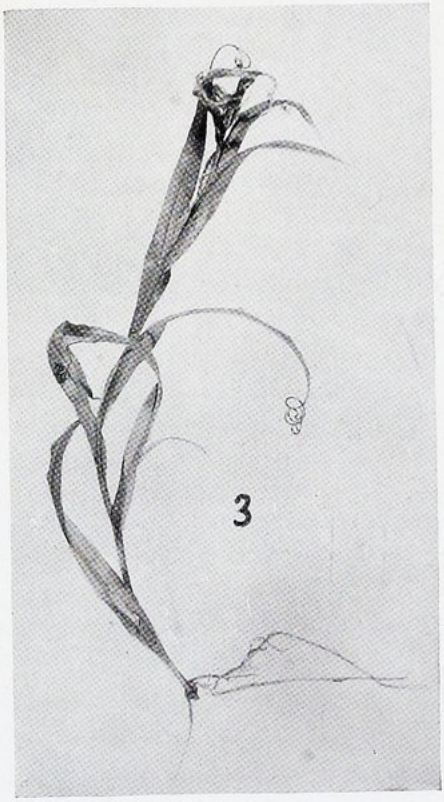
Illustrating L. B. Stewart's Paper on Mutisia decurrens, Cav.

The plate is taken from a photograph by Mr. R. M. Adam of rooted cuttings in the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.

FIG. 1. Intermediate stem-cutting—moderate development of root.
FIG. 2. Basal stem-cutting—poor development of root.
FIG. 3. Apical stem-cutting—strong development of root.







CUTTINGS OF MUTISIA DECURRENS, CAV.