

## Purchasing Potted Plants

When shopping for geraniums, choose plants based on their color and size. Look for healthy leaves, with no discolored spots above or underneath, fairly compact growth with no straggly stems that indicate it was grown in poor light, and no obvious pests. Choose plants with some flowers that are just opening, so that you can see the color of the blossoms.

Ivy geraniums are naturals for hanging baskets and window boxes. Flowers borne in small clusters come in a range of colors from the subtle white and mauve to the strident shades of pink and red. A riot of color in the spring, they continue the show through summer into fall.

## Growing Geraniums in Containers



Popular mainstays for containers, hanging baskets and window boxes, geraniums are well-behaved, low-maintenance, high-performance, sultry garden divas. They mix beautifully with annuals such as lobelia, vinca vine, petunias and verbena, making them attractive additions on decks, patios, porches and balconies.

### Container Growing Tips:

**Container:** Use a container with drainage holes to prevent soggy soil, which can cause root rot.

**Soil:** A good quality soil-less potting mix (not dirt.)

**Light:** Full sun.

**Water:** Water thoroughly, allow to dry out before watering again. Do not use a saucer under the container unless filled with pebbles.

**Fertilizer:** Fertilize every 2 weeks with a balanced water-soluble fertilizer at half strength.

**Propagation:** Unless you treat your plants as annuals, take stem cuttings in early summer and root in fresh potting mix.



## For More Information

Please consider our NGB member companies as authoritative sources for information. At [www.ngb.org](http://www.ngb.org) click on direct links to their websites by selecting Member Info from the upper left menu for the Complete Member List. Gardeners looking for seed sources should select companies listed as Retail.

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**NGB**  
YEAR  
OF THE  
GERANIUM



Few plants offer such variation in flower color, growth habit, leaf pattern, and scent. Lush growing geraniums, popular mainstays in containers for indoor and outdoor culture, also thrive in borders and beds by themselves, or mixed in with other annuals. In fact, these versatile plants are perfect for any spot that calls for a splash of sparkling color throughout the season.

The bedding plants gardeners plant out in late spring and bring inside in autumn are commonly known as geraniums; but geraniums they are not. They are pelargoniums. True geraniums are the cranesbills, hardy North American and European herbaceous perennials. Pelargoniums are semi-tender or tender plants mostly from South Africa. Both the Pelargonium and the Geranium belong to the family of Geraniaceae.

## Four Basic Types of Geraniums:

**Common or Zonal Geraniums** (*Pelargonium x hortorum*) Deriving its name from the “zoned” leaf markings, zonals thrive in both containers and in the landscape, and they require minimum care.

Most commonly available in single or double-flowered types, the upright, mounding, typically 1 to 2 foot tall plants have blossoms that range from white, to salmon, pink, orange, magenta, lavender and red, to numerous flashy variations of bi-colored blossoms. Within this group are “stellars” with thin, spiky star-shaped petals and leaves; unusual tulip-flowered types and pompon rosebuds. There are dwarfs less than 10” tall like the profusely blooming “deacons,” and miniatures less than 6 inches tall.



Fancy-leaved zonal geraniums produce leaves in shades varying from very pale, yellowish green to dark green to a dark band containing reddish pigment.

The differences

in the extent that the three colors overlap create a plethora of plants all with different patterns of colored leaves.

**Regal and Angel Geraniums** (*Pelargonium domesticum*) – The Regals, also known as Martha Washington geraniums, are bushy plants with large blossoms, single or double flowers in dramatic colors and patterns. Regals tend to be spring blooming, requiring cool nighttime temperatures to bud. Angels are smaller versions of Regals developed for their dazzling blooms which look somewhat like pansies.

**Scented-Leaf Geranium** (*Pelargonium domesticum*) – Scented-leaf geraniums are heirloom plants grown for their pleasing fragrance, unusual foliage, delicate flowers, essential oil and culinary use. The scent, created by oils in the leaves, is released when the leaves are rubbed or bruised. The fragrance may remind you of roses, lemons, cloves, nutmeg, pine, peppermint, apple, pineapple, chocolate, coconut and all kinds of other indescribably spicy fragrances.

**Ivy-Leaf Geranium** (*Pelargonium peltatum*) – Plants with long stems full of sculptured, ivy shaped leaves and gracefully trailing habits, they are immensely popular for hanging baskets, window-boxes and containers. Flowering abundantly throughout the summer, they have smaller, looser flower umbels of single, semi-double or double blossoms in shades of deep maroon, red or pink.

## Starting Geraniums from Seed

Geraniums are easy to grow from seed, but they are rather slow growing. Sow seeds indoors eight to ten weeks prior to the last average frost date in your area, or from the date when you'd be setting out other warm-weather annuals. Flowering generally occurs 12 to 16 weeks after sowing.

- Fill clean individual pots, flats or shallow containers having good drainage with a thoroughly moistened, sterile seed-starting mix to within a half-inch of the top. Tamp the mix gently.
- Sow one or two seeds per pot or cell if using flats. Sow seed in rows 2 to 3 inches apart and cover with about 1/8 inch of the medium. Mist the mix with enough water to moisten it thoroughly.
- Label, cover with a sheet of clear plastic or place in a plastic bag and tie it shut with a twist tie to insure a uniform moisture level during the germination period.
- Set the container in a warm location, out of bright light, keeping the growing medium between 70° and 75°F (21° - 24°C) by placing it on a heating mat or warm surface.
- Seedlings usually emerge in one to two weeks. Remove the plastic covering and keep the mix evenly moist – but not soggy – by watering from the bottom.
- When the tiny plants have 3 or 4 leaves, transplant them into cell packs or individual 2 ¼-inch or larger pots. Seedlings growing in individual pots or cells need only thinning. Snip the weakest seedling with scissors so that only the strongest-looking one remains.
- Grow seedlings under fluorescent lights with the lights on for 12 to 14 hours, or in a south facing window with direct sunlight.

- Water thoroughly when the soil surface is dry to the touch and fertilize weekly with a one-quarter strength houseplant fertilizer. Pinch tips to encourage branching.
- Harden the plants outdoors and plant when the danger of frost has passed.

## Geraniums as Bedding Plants

Geraniums are popular garden plants because of their long-lasting flower displays, even under adverse weather conditions. Plants currently available are seed grown, providing a longer display of color that lasts well into fall. They look good in a bed all by themselves, mixed-in with other annuals, or wherever there is a need



for a splash of vibrant color. Warm weather plants, geraniums should not be planted outdoors until all danger of frost is past and the soil has warmed.

For maximum bloom, plant them where they'll get at least 4 to 6 hours of direct sunlight daily and space the plants 8 - 12 inches apart. Geraniums need good air circulation, but should be protected from strong winds which can break their brittle branches.

Geraniums should be planted in moisture retentive, but well drained good garden soils, at the same level as they were growing in pots. Mulch, where possible to reduce soil temperature extremes and weed growth.

Promptly deadhead spent flowering stems to promote additional flowering. Pinch stems to prevent legginess and promote bushiness.

They are heavy feeders. For best results, mix a granular fertilizer (5-10-5) in the soil before planting, switching to a balanced, water-soluble (10-10-10) one, to be applied every 4 to 6 weeks during the growing season.

Water geraniums regularly if there is no rain, preferably early in the day to allow leaves and flowers to dry before nightfall, to help prevent disease.