

Year Round Gardening

Overwintering Geraniums

By Debra Stinton Othitis, Colorado Master Gardener

Geraniums add vibrant color to our gardens each year and it is difficult to watch them die from that first hard frost. Because geraniums are tender perennials and not annuals like most summer ornamentals, they can be overwintered or propagated from cuttings. Here are some easy ways to keep geraniums through the winter for a head start on blooms next spring.

Before the first frost, you can pot-up the plants or take cuttings. With either method, your chances of success are greatly increased if your plants are vigorous, healthy, and insect and disease-free.

If you grew your geraniums in individual pots for the summer, just bring them indoors after examining each plant carefully to make sure you're not bringing insects indoors. You may want to re-pot them in fresh potting soil to minimize the risk of insects. For plants in larger pots or in the ground, carefully dig up the geranium and plant in a 6–8 inch pot with potting soil. Garden soil is too heavy for indoor use. Prune back each plant by one-half, cutting the stems just above a leaf.



Ideally, geraniums need at least 10-12 hours of light indoors, so place the plants in a bright south window or under fluorescent lights. Insufficient light will result in weak growth and poor flower production during the winter. If you don't have a brightly lit location, try to keep the plants cool, but well above freezing to slow their growth and

reduce the need for bright light. Indoor temperatures are also important. Keep your geraniums at day time temperatures of 65-70° F and 55-60° F at night. Excessively warm temperatures may result in leggy plants.

Geraniums are easy to root from cuttings. This approach allows using smaller plants that take up less space. They also have a better chance of acclimating to indoor light, temperature, and humidity levels. To take a cutting, remove a 3-4 inch section of the plant's stem tip with a sharp knife. Pinch off leaves from the lower half of the cutting and dip the cut end into a rooting hormone. Rooting hormones are available through nurseries and garden centers. Stick the cuttings in a moist, porous, well-drained rooting media such as perlite or vermiculite with proper drainage and place them in bright, indirect light.

Cuttings root best in a moist, humid environment which can easily be achieved by securing a clear plastic bag over the cuttings and container. This "mini-greenhouse" should be placed in bright, but indirect light. After 6-8 weeks roots will be approximately one inch long and cuttings can be planted into a 3-4 inch container with well-drained potting soil. Place in a sunny window and water as needed. Pinch shoot tips back to force branching and prevent spindly growth. New plants produced from cuttings should be vigorous and about the same size as most geraniums sold in spring.

Plant your geraniums outdoors again after the danger of frost has passed and enjoy their colorful blooms again next summer.

Colorado State University Extension is conducting "Putting your Vegetable Garden to bed" class on September 18. Visit <http://elpaso.extension.colostate.edu/> for more information and registration.

When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research based answers. Get answers to your horticulture questions by visiting ask.extension.org or by calling a Colorado Master Gardener Volunteer at 520-7684, 9:00 to 12:00 Monday – Thursday.