Geraniums are excellent as flowering or foliage type house plants. They are very useful as bedding or edging plants in the flower bed or border. Geraniums may be used in window boxes, as specimen potted plants on the patio, for flanking the front entrance, or as an edging to define the limits of a terrace or paved area.

Types of Geraniums

**Zonal, House or Bedding Geraniums** (P. zonale x P. inquinans or P. hortorum) are the most common and are used for house plants, window boxes and flower beds. The name Zonal is derived from the reddish zone or band of color on the leaves. Many varieties are available with single or double flowers in colors including red, salmon, pink and white. Dwarf types which reach a height of 5 to 6 inches are also available.

Carefree geraniums may be grown from seed. Varieties are available with white, and 8 shades of pink and red flowers. Carefree geraniums are quite free from disease, and are excellent for use as house plants or in flower beds and borders. The plants continue to bloom during the late summer after many annual flowers have stopped.

**Show, Pansy, or Lady Washington Geraniums** (P. domesticum) are sometimes called Pelargonium. The plants start blooming in late winter and continue into the summer. Cuttings for winter flowering may be taken in July or August after the blooming period is completed. The flowers of the Show geranium are excellent as long lasting cut flowers and are fine for corsages. The flowers are usually white, pink or red, with two large colorful upper petals.

**Ivy-leaved Geraniums** (P. peltatum) have leaves which are shaped like English ivy. The plant has a somewhat weak trailing type of growth with flowers from spring until fall in colors from rose to white. Ivy geraniums may be used in hanging baskets and window boxes. **Scented Leaf Geraniums** are of several species and have scents of lemon, mint, rose or spice, and interesting leaf patterns. Compact and trailing types are available. **Variegated Foliage Geraniums** are also found in several species and produce leaves with color variations of green, yellow, or white.

**Geranium Culture as House Plants**

Geraniums are usually propagated by cuttings which should be taken in July for plants which will bloom in winter, except for Show or Pansy geraniums which are started in August. Young plants should be potted in a soil mixture which is relatively heavy and may be prepared by using 3 parts soil, 1 part peat, 1 part sand and 1/2 part dried manure, plus 1/2 cup of 5-10-5 fertilizer per peck of the mixture.

The pots used for geraniums which are to be used as house plants, should have a drainage hole at the base, be neutral in color which will not attract attention from the plant, and be as small as possible to hold the root system and yet support the plant. Use an inch of gravel or crushed stone over a piece of broken crock in the bottom of the pot to provide drainage. Leave 1/2 to 1 inch of space at the top for watering. Small plants may be placed in 4-inch pots, medium-sized plants in 6 to 8 inch pots, and large plants in 10 to 12 inch pots. Plastic or glazed crockery containers are as satisfactory as porous clay pots if adequate drainage is provided.

Locate each plant on a mound in the center of the pot, with the soil about a half inch lower at the side, to cause the water to drain away from the stem and reduce the possibility of rot. Do not apply too much water to geraniums. Allow
the soil to become dry to the touch, and then add water at room temperature, not more often than once each day. Avoid syringing the foliage which may cause leaf diseases and rot.

Geraniums need sunlight to set flower buds and may stop blooming during cloudy weather in winter. Place the plants in a sunny window, and turn regularly to maintain symmetrical growth. The use of supplemental incandescent light will help promote flowering, but light from fluorescent tubes, which will promote the growth of foliage plants, and the flowering of shade-loving plants like African violet, will not cause blooming of a sun-loving plant like geranium.

Cool temperature is essential for vigorous floriferous growth. A daytime temperature of about 65°F is preferred, with 10 degrees lower at night. The humidity of the air around the plant may be increased by setting the pots on pebbles in a shallow pan of water, but the pot itself should not be in the water.

Apply soluble house plant fertilizer as needed to maintain good green foliage. Avoid excess fertilizer, which will increase vegetative growth and reduce flowering.

The plants should be pruned regularly by pinching back the terminals, especially during the late summer and fall to develop satisfactory shape. Flower buds should be removed during this period to promote sturdy growth for winter blooming. Better flowering will be secured if geraniums are allowed to become somewhat pot-bound.

The geraniums you have used as house plants may be planted in a flower bed or border for the summer. Then, in July, take cuttings to produce new vigorous plants for use indoors in the fall. The old plants will not have attractive form and foliage for another winter.

Geraniums for the Flower Bed or Border

Geraniums are particularly useful in a flower bed or border. Plants in 4-inch pots with 2 or 3 branches are an ideal size for planting. Select a sunny location with a fertile, well drained soil. Geraniums are somewhat tender to cold and should be transplanted to the garden about a week after the average date of the last frost.

The Carefree geraniums may be raised from seeds planted in late January, to produce plants with blooms in 4-inch pots in late May for use as outdoor bedding plants. The germination rate may be quite uneven. Some seedlings may appear in about one week, and others continuing to emerge for several weeks.

Space the plants to allow each one to develop its natural bushy form. Allow about 15 to 18 inches between plants. Apply moderate applications of 5-10-5 fertilizer to promote vigorous green growth. Geraniums need plenty of water but be sure the soil does not remain saturated which would cause stem rot.

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