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Geraniums accent flower borders

Geraniums are one of the most popular plants for the flower garden partly because they are so easy to grow.

Most people buy geranium plants in the late spring or early summer from a garden centre. These may have been propagated either from cuttings or from seed and are usually sold as flowering plants in 10 centimetre pots from which they are transplanted into the garden.

Geraniums are most effective in groups of several plants in the flower border or as accents in a shrub border. They are often used as pot plants on the patio or in planters.

Geraniums will thrive in any average, well-drained garden soil and preferably in full sunlight, says Horticulturist Patricia Harney, of the department of horticultural science, University of Guelph.

The soil may be improved by adding humus from a compost

pile or commercial peat moss.

Work in a commercial fertilizer, such as 6-9-8 into the soil. Plant only after risk of frost is over, usually the end of May or early June in many localities. Invert the pot containing the geranium, tap it lightly on the bottom and the plant will come out with an intact ball of earth around its roots. Be careful not to break the ball of earth.

Set the plants a little deeper in the soil than they were in the container. Press the soil firmly around the root ball and water the entire area thoroughly after all the plants have been planted. Space the plants about 45 cm apart.

Water the plants whenever needed during the summer and soak thoroughly each time. Remove dead flowers and leaves periodically.

Your geraniums will then thrive and flower until frost.



ADD COLOR — Create colorful planting areas on your deck or balcony by growing flowers in window boxes, patio tubs and hanging baskets. Fill large, half-barrels with a good porous soil mix, incorporate a slow-release fertilizer and choose plants that grow well in restricted soil volumes. Feed regularly and water frequently for best results. Here Mrs. John Hughes of Milton, Ont., plants geraniums and a large Dracaena (spike grass) in a balcony tub. (photo by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food)

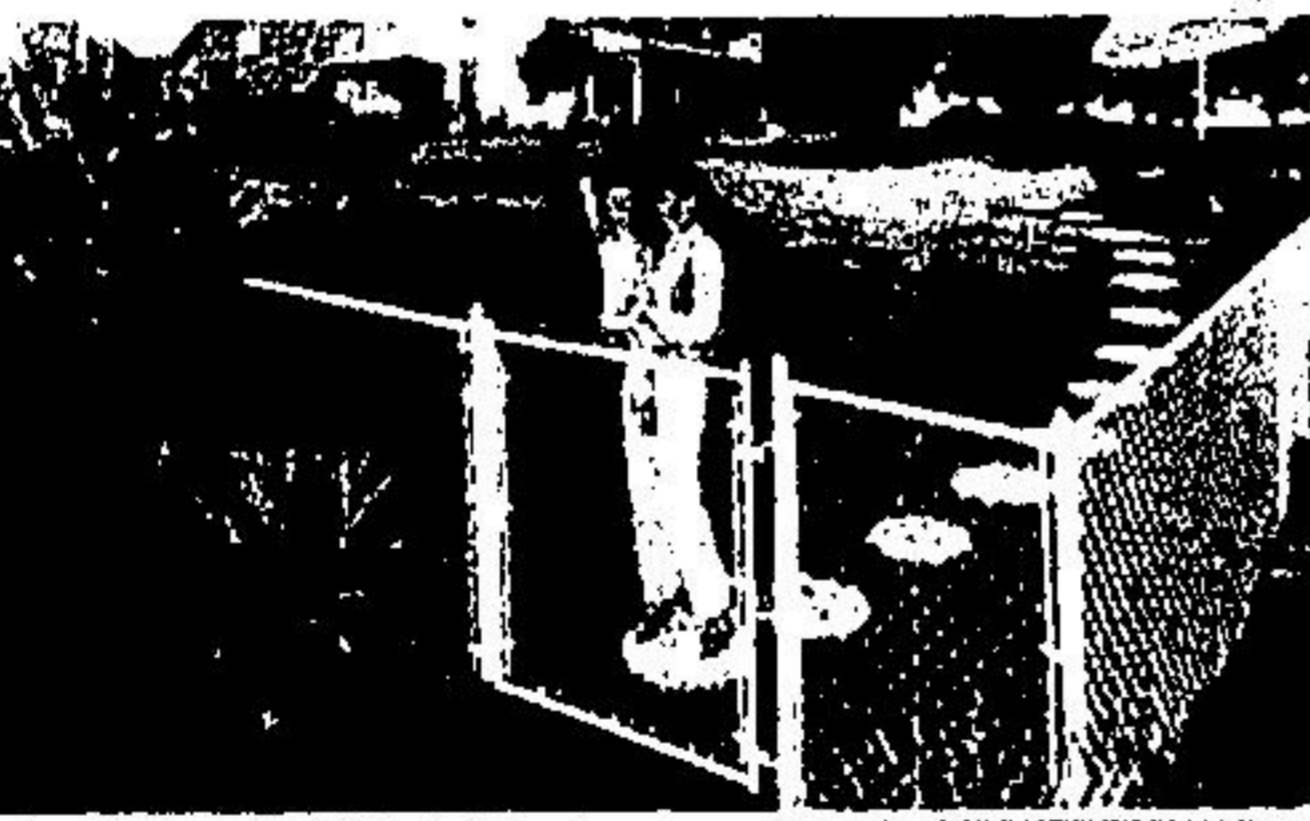
Make your balcony bloom

Flower Power

Hybrid geraniums are grown from seed by commercial growers. They tend to be short stemmed with beautiful flowers that will last throughout the growing season. These newer varieties tend to be heat-resistant and thrive in summer and early fall when many other garden plants have begun to decline, says Tony Hogervorst, rural organizations co-ordinator (Horticulture) with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food's rural organizations and services branch.

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Window boxes, patio tubs and hanging baskets are ideal containers for creating colorful planting areas on your deck or balcony. But in all cases, the restricted soil volume can create some problems, says Horticulturist John Hughes of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food's plant industry branch.

Try the large, half-barrels, 60 centimetres (24 inches) to 70 centimetres (28 inches) in diameter that hold about 0.25 cubic metres (eight to nine cubic feet) of good porous soil mix.

A soil mix such as 50 per cent coarse peat, 25 per cent perlite or vermiculite, 10 per cent to 15 per cent coarse aggregate such as surface, heydite or terraplas and 10 per cent pasteurized loam makes an open, well-drained mix, he says.

Incorporate a slow-release fertilizer before planting at a rate of one-half the manufacturer's recommendation. Then apply an additional liquid feed as the plants demand. Use a complete water soluble fertilizer such as 20-20-20 on a weekly basis at a rate of one gram of 20-20-20 dissolved in a litre of water.

Avoid the turf and general fertilizers because their higher salt indexes can be very damaging to plants grown in restricted soil volumes.

One of the best plants for patio tubs is a large Dracaena (spike grass). These are available in 10 cm (four in.) pots and will last right up to the end of October. They can then be taken indoors for the winter.

Try regular zonal geraniums such as Yours Truly and Sincerity in the larger 10 cm. (four in.) pots and inter-mix some vines such as vinca or English ivy. Lobelia's bright blue and dusty miller's powder white hues also add color contrast and survive