

Misnamed 'geraniums' should be planted now

Each year the National Garden Bureau names a flower and a vegetable of the year. This year, 1998, is the year of the geranium or more correctly, *pelargonium*.

Although usually treated as a garden annual, the geranium is actually a tender perennial (in warm climates, it lives on in the garden from year to year) while the true geranium, called cranesbill, is a hardy performer in our own perennial gardens.

History
The first geraniums (*pelargonium triste*) were brought to England from South Africa by the famous plantsman John Tradescant in the early 17th Century.

Other explorers brought back different species, some with fragrant foliage.

Plant enthusiasts began hybridizing these African pelargoniums and as early as 1732 references were made to *Px hortorum* (a cross between *P. inguinans* and *P. zonale*).

the garden geranium of today. It wasn't until the end of the 18th Century that pelargoniums were given their own genus.

The Victorian era saw a phenomenal increase in varieties in a range of flower colours - singles and doubles, unusual flower shapes (carnation, rosebud, tulip) varied foliage, ivy-leaf trailing types, azalea-flowered Martha Washington or regals and many varieties with fragrant foliage.

New varieties were

hybridized from seed, but if they were deemed worthwhile they were propagated from cuttings.

Beginning in the 1950s, Richard Craig of Pennsylvania State University began the task of making growing from seed a commercial option.

In 1966, the first F1 hybrid geranium from seed was developed. In 1968, the 'Carefree' series of three colours was offered for sale by the Pan American Seed Company.



Let's Get Growing

Marjorie Mason-Hogue

The first offerings were diploids (produced from parents having two sets of identical chromosomes). In 1991, 'Freckles', the first tetraploid (having twice the chromosomes) was bred by the Pan American company.

Growing tips

Growing from seed is now a reliable method for the commercial grower and the home gardener.

You must get seeds started by this week to have blooming by June! The only seeds that will come true to variety are the F1 hybrids which you purchase. If a plant in your garden should set seed, the resulting offspring may be very different from the parent.

If you have a favourite plant, you can propagate it by taking cuttings in late August or early September. Those that have been growing on your windowsills all winter may have cuttings taken now.

Stick each one in a three-inch pot of soilless mix and place it in a warm location but not in bright sun (ie. the top of the refrigerator). Maintain high humidity with a plastic cover until roots begin to grow, then move the new plant to a sunny windowsill or to a fluorescent set-up for 12 to 14 hours of light a day.

New discoveries

The most exciting new discovery concerning pelargoniums is the work being done at Guelph University by Dr. Praveen Saxena using lemon-scented geraniums to remove large amounts of toxic heavy metals from contaminated soil. Yet another example of how a simple plant can heal us and our polluted world!

Be sure to visit the Ontario Geranium and Pelargonium Society's booth at Canada Blooms, March 11 to 15 at the Convention Centre in Toronto. Their next meeting is Sunday, April 19 at the Civic Garden Centre, 777 Lawrence Ave. E. in North York.

Send your questions or comments to Let's Get Growing, c/o this newspaper.

ADVERTISING CORRECTION

In our Storewide #2 Stock Up flyer, included in last week's newspaper on February 18, 1998, please note: Page 2 - Eaton Kid Prewalk Print Mary Jane will not be available. In our Storewide #3 Remarkable Value flyer, included in this week's newspaper on February 25, 1998, please note: Front Cover should read - All offers valid until March 1, 1998, unless otherwise specified. Back Cover should read - All sale offers and special buys good until March 1, 1998, or while quantities last, unless otherwise specified. Page 8 - Spice! Girl Dolls will not be available until March 25, 1998, orders will not be taken. We sincerely apologize to our valued customers and regret any inconvenience or confusion this may have caused.

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