

QUALITY GERANIUMS

Keith Brodin - Madsen Floral Company, Minneapolis

Geraniums are not a difficult crop to grow, that is, they are not difficult if a few basic needs are recognized and provided. Probably the most important is temperature. Being a sub-tropical plant, geraniums are not happy in a 50° temperature range. From cuttings to finished plants, we believe geraniums should have a minimum of 60°.

Disease Control

The next important need is disease control. This involves not only sterilized propagating benches, soil, and pots, but careful plant selection and constant roguing of stock plants. Variety selection is important in this connection. Better Time's is the most resistant to the much-feared "black leg". The Fiats, Mont Mort and Madonna are probably the least resistant with other varieties someplace in between these two groups.

Propagation

Rooting of cuttings cannot be a 100 per cent proposition but it can be kept in the higher 90 per cent bracket. We use a mixture of #16 grade perlite and sedge (black) peat at a 50-50 ratio by volume, steam sterilized, of course. We provide a little bottom heat, 60° nights and warmer days depending on the amount of sunlight. We use no shade at anytime except a little on the glass in summer. Only two to three inches of propagating medium are used and this is saturated before the cuttings are stuck. Cuttings are never watered after sticking unless the medium gets quite dry and then only after cuttings are calloused. Cuttings are trimmed carefully, removing surplus leaves and all stipules (the leafy bracts attached to the stem at the base of the leaves). All but the smallest leaves are removed on cuttings shipped in from California. The cut is made very close to a leaf joint or node. A cut almost through the joint is better than a cut too far below.

We use a rooting powder on fresh cut dry cuttings. DO NOT WET CUTTINGS BEFORE DIPPING IN POWDER. This is important. Geraniums neither need nor want a strong rooting agent. We use Rootone F. which contains a fungicide.

In potting cuttings, it is essential that a soil rather low in nitrates is used. We get our best results with a high-humus soil. If your soil is heavy (clay), add liberal amounts of coarse sand and well rotted manure or peat. Geraniums want good drainage. They also like a neutral or only very slightly alkaline soil. A pH of 6.9 to 7.3 seems best for us. We add 0-20-0 and crushed limestone to the potting soil and apply nitrates and potash in liquid form after the cuttings are established. We also prefer direct potting of cuttings into the finishing pots, usually three and three-quarter inch in the Twin City area.

If you will carry a 60° temperature, six to eight weeks is all you need to finish good short, strong plants from potting of the rooted cutting to bloom. At 50°, double that time is needed and blooming will be more uneven.

Fertilization

Keep your plants well fertilized. We use 7 ounces of urea (Nugreen, 46-0-0) and 12 ounces of muriate of potash (0-0-60) per 50 gallons of water every 10 days to two weeks depending on sunlight; that is, the brighter the weather the more fertilizer.

Keep your plants watered but not soaked. Don't let the roots grow through into the bench, and space promptly, as soon as leaves touch.

You will find that geraniums grown by this method, without a check from propagating bench to blooming, are easy to sell and handle. They have a finished appearance that has real customer appeal which is not evident in plants that have been checked several times along the way. The gardener that buys them will be back next year. Try it. It's fun to sell nice geraniums. The customers will soon come to you instead of you to them.