

ARE SEED GERANIUMS HERE TO STAY?

Carl A. Salsedo
Regional Horticultural Extension Agent

During the past several years, more Connecticut geranium producers have been growing seed geraniums. Geraniums are a very popular and profitable item and accounted for around 96 million dollars worth of sales on a wholesale level in the United States. The change from propagation of cuttings to the growing of seed has certain advantages as well as disadvantages.

Advantages include:

1. Cost of the finished product may be lower-- you don't need to hold over stock plants or purchase cuttings (costs rise yearly). There is less overhead involved in the propagation area because less space is required to start plants from seeds than from stock plants.
2. The total crop can be scheduled from start to finish with precise scheduling, allowing a better timed crop.
3. Bedding plant use has increased since many seed geraniums are being grown and sold by the flat.

Disadvantages may include:

1. Growing temperatures and other cultural conditions are quite specific and must be carefully controlled.
2. Flowers may not hold up as well as the cutting produced cultivars.
3. The first flush of flowers for May sales may not be as striking as on geraniums produced from cuttings.

4. The consumer is presently more familiar with cultivars produced from cuttings. However, seed cultivars are gradually being accepted in New England.

CULTURE

Sow seed in loose, sterile medium. Germination should be completed in about two weeks, if the soil temperature is kept at 70-75°F. Transplanting should usually be done within 14 days of sowing. A few days after transplanting, drench with a fungicide. About five weeks after sowing, at the 4 to 5 leaf stages, spray with Cycocel 1:80. Repeat this spray in one week. Maintain optimum fertility and moisture levels to finish the crop on time.

The entire cultural program will require 15 to 17 weeks. Seed geraniums are probably here to stay. Their continued existence is dependent upon consumer acceptance. Perhaps, as newer cultivars are developed which offer a greater selection of colors, faster flowering, and better branching and growth patterns, the seed geranium's popularity will continue to grow.