

IV. SUMMER CARE OF GERANIUMS

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If you are growing geranium stock plants for next year, better keep them in the greenhouse this summer. All of the principle diseases and pests of geraniums seem to thrive outdoors. It is easier to control disease by prevention in the greenhouse than to try to clean up problems brought in from outside.

Growing Stock Plants -- First, you should have either planted cultured plants or selected your own best stock in early May. Next, a choice must be made as to whether you should grow in pots or in benches. You will find an argument here.

Pots are easier to move when spring space is needed, and they may be cut back and sold for Easter and Mother's Day, or held for bedding work. They may be set up on automatic watering tubes and thus it is easier to control the relative softness of the cutting. Soft cuttings produced on plants grown in wet benches are prone to get black-leg. Also pots can be grown on shelves.

Benches are less expensive and quicker to plant. Planting spaces range from 8 x 8 to 12 x 12, depending on the vigor of the variety. Benches can be watered by several watering systems and don't dry out as fast. You will get more cuttings, but they may be soft and you may lose more.

Soil -- Generally a 3-1-1 mixture below 70 PPM of soluble salts is satisfactory. Drainage is essential, and adding perlite helps the aeration. Add 3-5 lbs. of lime per cubic yard or 50 lbs. per 1,000 square feet; also, superphosphate at 2-3 lbs. per cu. yard. Go light on the feed for the first month or two.

Pinching? -- Keeping plants sprouting from low breaks by early pinching is one school. Another trick for the retail grower is to stake them with no pinch, allowing 3-5 stems per plant. These are chopped up in February to leaf bud cuttings. The cuttings are thus stored on the plant, saving space.

Roguing is essential in any case. Throw out any plant which appears to be sick. Never take cuttings with a knife for the juice may spread bacterial wilt on the blade.

Sanitation is important to control botrytis. Keep dead leaves and flowers picked off. Those angular leaf spots and blackened flower centers are from botrytis. Spray regularly bi-weekly or at least once a month with captan or zineb.

Ventilation is important with no heat on. Ventilate at sundown to reduce humidity. Space plants well for good ventilation. Water in the morning and avoid watering on cool, cloudy days.

Temperature -- Geraniums prefer 55° to 60°. Many varieties do poorly in the summer, because of the heat. Enchantress, for example, does best in your coolest house. Run fans and keep a light shade on to reduce temperatures.

Watering -- Water well; then let them get almost dry before watering again. Hang up that hose to avoid re-infesting pots or beds. Avoid overhead watering.

Handling the Plants spreads disease. Wash hands in LF10 at 1:200. Break cuttings and keep in clean containers. If you use a knife, disinfect it by dipping in alcohol and swap knives between plants. Chlorox, 1 oz. plus 9 oz. of water is effective as a knife dip; soak for 5 minutes. Cleanliness is your best insurance to reduce loss from disease.