Keeping Geraniums Over Winter

Fact Sheet FS1156

Cooperative Extension

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Home gardeners are faced with a decision in the early fall regarding their florist geraniums, Pelargonium, that are growing and blooming beautifully but will soon fall victim to frost. How may they be saved for replanting in the spring?

The Hang and Dry Method

The traditional method is to remove the plants from the soil and shake off any excess soil. The entire plant should then be put in a loosely closed paper bag and hung upside down in a cool dry spot for the winter. The temperature should not go below freezing or above 50°F. Do not store in a plastic bag, as the humidity builds up and the plants will rot.

In March, when some of the geraniums may begin to sprout, dead wood and leaves should be removed, and the stem and roots pruned with a clean sharp tool. The plants should be potted in sandy soil, in a pot just large enough to hold the roots. Water, and place in partial sun the first week, gradually bringing them into full sun. Grow as houseplants until after the last frost date. Do not water excessively. Not all plants will survive.

The Houseplant Method

Several weeks before a killing frost is expected, take the plants out of the ground and prune back by one-half to one-third, keeping large healthy leaves. Plant in a clean pot immediately. Keep the geraniums outdoors for a week or so to become acclimated to the pots. Check for the presence of insects and diseases, treating or discarding problem plants. Bring the geraniums indoors, giving them as much sun as possible, and turn them frequently. Four hours of direct sunlight is ideal. The best temperature is about 68°F daytime and about 55°F at night. Water sparingly, only enough to keep the potting mix from completely drying out. Do not fertilize autumn through late winter. Mid-March, water more often, allowing the top ½ inch of the potting mix to dry out between waterings. Begin fertilizing with a dilute solution of flowering houseplant fertilizer. These plants may not bloom indoors, but the plants will be sturdy and make a good showing early the next summer when returned outdoors.

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