

Cultural Details: **Geranium (Pelargonium)**

A mainstay of bedding plant sales and parks and landscape displays, geraniums were originally propagated only from cuttings, but the development of seed-raised F1 hybrids means savings in cost, quicker production (better use of greenhouse space), freedom from many diseases, and access to a wide range of colours including bicolours. Given sufficient warmth, geraniums are easy to raise from seed.

Variety Selection

Multiflora types such as Multibloom are ideal for 4- and 6-pack sales as they are quick into flower. Maverick, Horizon etc are the best choice for pot sales and parks plantings.

Trailing varieties such as Tornado and Summer Showers are ideal for Hanging Baskets.

F2 varieties are useful where cost is an issue but flowering is delayed, colour range limited, and habit can be quite variable on the cheapest varieties.

Programming the Crop

The most usual production time is sow January for sales as green plants late April onwards, and in flower May and June.

It is also possible to sow in October, and overwinter cool, for flowering plants late April onwards.

As geranium flowering is unaffected by daylength, it is also theoretically possible to sow August, for flowering plants late December-January, given sufficient warmth and daylight.

Propagation and Growing-on

Seed is large at around 220 per gram. Sow into plug trays ideally to prevent root disturbance, or seedling trays. Germination is rapid (around 4 days) at 21-23°C, when sown onto an open seed-sowing compost and covered lightly with vermiculite. Light is not necessary for germination. A precautionary fungicidal drench can be used against damping-off disease, and good glasshouse hygiene (new pots/packs, fresh compost, clean water, clean bench tops) reduces the sources of disease attack. Do not allow the germinating seedlings to dry out.

After 4 weeks, prick out into 4- or 6-packs or 9cm pots, and grow on at around 15°C. (Much higher temperatures, where light levels are still low, may cause leggy growth.)

Alternately prick out into larger cell trays before the final pot/pack, to allow better control of watering, and less use of greenhouse space. Sowing to flowering takes 13-16 weeks depending on variety and time of year (daylight/heat levels). Temperatures can be dropped in the last few weeks, to around 12 °C. Use a suitable liquid feed programme as the plants develop.

Keep the plants growing actively, with even moisture, to lessen chances of disease attack. Good air movement, and watering in the morning rather than late in the day, will lessen Grey Mould (Botrytis) problems.

Growth Regulators

At the time of writing, the growth regulator Cycocel (Chlormequat) is generally used (according to the manufacturers' guidelines) on Geraniums to ensure a compact habit, and leaf zoning patterns also become stronger. The variety Video Mixed has such a compact habit that growth regulator use is unnecessary.

Information provided for guidance only, as cultural practices and climatic circumstances vary.