

Clippings



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For Immediate Release

Garden Geraniums: Growing them from seed

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It's never too early to think about gardening. Especially, with all the garden catalogs I've been receiving. I'm already considering types of flowers for my containers that will line the front steps and patio. The plan is to include garden geraniums. They are one of my favorite flowers.

My mom grew them every summer when I was growing up. We had a large, rectangular planter made of brick in front of the house. Every year it would be loaded with geraniums and petunias. Now when I see that combination I get nostalgic. It brings warm memories of mom gardening and me playing outside around the flowerbox with friends.

Geraniums are an excellent choice for pots and flower beds (I guess mother knows best). Besides being a pretty flower, they are easy to grow, manage well in summer heat, and bloom spring through the first fall frost. You do need to deadhead them to encourage new blooms and keep the plant looking its best but it's an easy flower to grow.

This winter, I plan to start my geraniums from seed. It's not difficult but since the seedlings are slow to grow, they have to be started in February, if you want blooms in May. It takes approximately 15 weeks from sowing the seeds until first blooms.

When starting a plant from seed, always start with quality seeds and a good seed-starting mix. Germination mediums are sterile and light weight. Start seeds in containers that are clean and have good drainage. If you are reusing containers from a previous year, wash them with warm, soapy water and disinfect them using a weak bleach solution (1 part bleach to 9 parts water). Starting with sterile growing medium and clean containers minimizes the risk of soil-borne diseases affecting your seeds or seedlings.



Keep the growing medium moist, but not soggy. It's easier to moisten the medium before sowing the seeds. That way they don't float off as they tend to do if you pour water over them after planting. To promote germination, cover the seed trays with plastic wrap. This helps keep the planting medium both warm and moist. Geranium seeds germinate best with the temperature of the medium between 70 to 75 degrees F. Remove the wrap as soon as the plants sprout, which for geraniums is usually in seven to ten days.

The seedlings need bright light right after they germinate. If they receive insufficient light they develop into tall and spindly or "leggy" plants. For best results, place seedlings under artificial light. In my basement, I have several shelves set-up with lamps clamped above each shelf. I use plant grow lights but fluorescent lights would also work. The lights should be no more than four to six inches above the seedlings. Since I don't move my lights, to keep the seedlings a proper distance to the light, I place the trays on a stack of books and as the seedlings grow, I shorten the stack as needed. Seedlings need at least 12 hours of light daily. If supplemental lighting isn't available, place seedlings in a sunny window. Check seedlings every day and water as needed being careful not to over water.

To learn more about sowing seeds indoors, download a free copy of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach publication "Starting Garden Transplants at Home" from our extension online store (<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/>). If you have a hankering to talk gardening, stop by our Master Gardener Winter Wonderland Open House on Saturday, Jan. 16 from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at the Prairie Queen Bakery and Restaurant in Sheldon. Enjoy some hot coffee, treats and green-thumb conversation.

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