

❖ Renee's Garden ❖

Scented Geranium Growing Guide

Planting in Beds

There are literally hundreds of types of scented geraniums, all native to South Africa. Foliage size and shape also varies, as will foliage color and texture. While scented geraniums do flower, the flowers are small; these plants are mainly grown for their attractive and highly scented foliage.

Scented geraniums are not are not picky about soil types, but do require good drainage. If your soil is exceedingly alkaline, add some peat moss or compost when planting. Adequate but not too much watering is an essential aspect of geranium care. As a rule, allow the top inch of the soil to dry out before you water.

Pinch plants regularly to promote lush growth and maintain a bushy habit. In general, allow for three pairs of leaves before pinching off the new growth.

In hot summer/mild winter climates: Scented geraniums can be planted in full sun, but in very hot summer climates position them in partial shade or indirect sun.

In cold winter climates: Scented geraniums resent frosty weather. However, they do quite well overwintered indoors. Any planted in the ground may be dug up and transplanted into containers.

ON ARRIVAL: Your plants have spent 3-4 days in transit without light or water and may have yellow leaves or show evidence of wilting. We have found that 99% of these plants will survive and thrive as long as you follow these simple care instructions:

Remove your plants from their shipping box as soon as possible, taking care not to damage stems or leaves. If the soil is dry, water gently but thoroughly. Place the pots in bright but indirect light indoors or, if temperatures have reached 50-55°F (10-13°C) both day and night, outside in bright shade, sheltered from the wind.

Remember: Even if your plants arrive on a glorious warm spring day, they need to get used to being outdoors before being planted. If they're going to be planted outdoors, expose plants to outdoor conditions gradually so they have the chance to acclimate to increasing amounts of sunlight. Plan to transplant your plants from their 3 1/2 inch shipping pots within 10 days of arrival, as they definitely will need more room. Plants are small and delicate, so use caution when transplanting.

First cut them back by half to reduce the shock to the roots, then move them inside into a sunny window or greenhouse before the first frosts are due. Another option is to take cuttings and allow them root in water during the cold months. This has the added benefit of providing a living, fragrant, bouquet. Alternatively, they can be treated as annuals and replaced yearly.

Planting in Pots

Choose pots at least 8-12 inches in diameter with drainage holes, filled with fresh, new potting soil. In very hot summer climates, they'll thrive in a place with afternoon shade.

After transplanting, put your potted plants either in full sun or in partial shade. When you transplant, tease apart the bottom of the roots slightly from the root ball to assist them in spreading into the new soil. Protect from freezing or extreme weather variation. Feed monthly with a good all-purpose fertilizer at the rate suggested by the manufacturer.

Adequate, but not too much watering is an essential aspect of geranium care. As a rule, the soil one inch below the surface should be allowed to dry before you water. Be sure to water your plants enough so that excess water drains from the bottom of the pot. Remember not to leave them sitting in water; this will result in root rot.

Pinch plant tips between your fingertips regularly to promote lush growth and maintain a bushy habit. In general, allow for three pairs of leaves before pinching off the new growth.

Growing Indoors

Choose pots at least 8 to 12 inches in diameter with drainage holes and saucers and fill with a light, moistened, but well-drained, fresh potting soil before planting your geraniums. A south or west-facing window that lets in lots of light is ideal for growing scented geraniums. You'll need to shade it in the heat of summer, but in the winter your scented geraniums will thrive.

Since geraniums are day length sensitive plants, at least half of the daylight hours indoors (8-10 hours)

should be in bright light or they will not actively grow (or will grow unattractive leggy branches). You can supplement the available natural light with a grow light in the winter months if necessary.

Watering should be done at soil level; misting the plant's leaves may cause them to become spotted. In the dry conditions of a home with central heating, growth will be enhanced by placing pots in a waterproof tray of gravel filled with water to just below the top of the gravel. Positioning the pot above rather than in the water prevents root rot. Good sanitation, good air circulation and frequent removal of any dead and damaged leaves will go a long way toward keeping your plants in good health.

The biggest pest of some scented geraniums is the whitefly, a tiny insect that lurks on the undersides of leaves and rises into the air when you run your hand over the foliage. To eliminate them, you can spray the undersides of the leaves with indoor insecticidal soap or a homemade mixture of 1 teaspoon of very mild dish soap and 1 quart of room temperature water. This will kill the adults. You will have to spray again a week later to take care of the next hatching. It's a good idea to use this spray once a month.

Botrytis, or gray mold, is a fungal disease that appears when conditions are damp and cold. Clean culture is the best prevention; frequently remove the debris that collects at the base of the plant which may harbor developing mold spores. Botrytis starts on the leaves as a gray mold. If you detect it early, you may be able to save the plant by pinching off the affected area. If you need to pinch off all or almost all of the leaves, you need to water sparingly until your plant regains its new leaves.

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