

ORANGE COUNTY GERANIUM SOCIETY

Pelargonium Culture

WATERING

One of the most important cares is that of watering. When the soil just under the top surface feels dry to the touch, watering is in order. Pelargoniums do not give a warning by wilting. By the time the symptom occurs roots have been damaged. Sudden yellowing and loss of lower leaves can result from the lack of moisture; however, over-watering can produce the same symptoms.

Add enough water so that it runs out through the bottom and then do not water again until the soil becomes dry under the top surface again. To facilitate watering, leave the soil level about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch below the rim of a four inch pot ((i.e. a water register of $\frac{3}{4}$ inch). Never leave a pot sitting in a saucer of water.

LEACHING

Leach potted plants at least once a month during the summer. Salts from water and fertilizer build up in soil to the point where they poison the plant. Leach by watering thoroughly 6 to 7 times in a row. This dissolves the salts and flushes them out of the soil. Immediately follow the leaching with an application of fertilizer.

SOIL

While the type of soil is important, it is not too critical problem because pelargoniums will grow in most kinds of soil, providing there is good drainage. They will not tolerate wet feet. A wet soggy soil will become sour and kill the plant. Avoid soils for acid loving plants (no peat moss). There are many good soils available at nurseries. If the mix becomes dry before use, moisten the mix. A soil mix should never be used while very dry. If the potting soil is compacting too much, try loosening it up with perlite or pumice.

SUN

Pelargoniums like sun, but should be shielded during the hottest part of the day. Protect them also from excess cold, wind or draft. Rotate your potted pelargonium a quarter turn in the same direction every few days to insure a more symmetrical growth.

FERTILIZING

Feed regularly, but lightly, with *a complete* fertilizer which includes trace elements. A *complete* fertilizer is one which contains nitrogen, potash and phosphorus – with none of the three ratio numbers on the label being zero. A time-release fertilizer may be added to the potting mix. Always water a plant thoroughly before applying fertilizer. When dry fertilizer is used, sprinkle the required amount on the

top of the soil near the edge of the container, work it in a bit and immediately water the plant again. Avoid fertilizers for acid-loving plants.

POTTING and REPOTTING

Pelargoniums are an ideal plant for container gardening. Do not over pot. They bloom better when slightly pot-bound, so when repotting move to the next larger pot size. An over potted plant is often an over watered and over-fed plant, and if it survives, may result in lush growth and few flowers. Water all plants after shifting transplanting, but do not feed them at this time if they have suffered root damage during the move. Wait about two weeks before you begin a regular feeding schedule with a good fertilizer.

CONTAINERS

Plastic pots do not dry out as quickly as clay. They require less water and are easily washed and reused. If you must mix clay and plastic pots on the same bench, be sure to check each plant before watering. You may also double pot your plants to protect their roots in the heat of summer.

PLACEMENT

Do not over-crowd plants. Light must reach them and air must circulate around them. A draft has a drying effect and the plant will lose moisture more quickly than it acquires it. They will grow and thrive in full sun but do best in filtered sunlight, for instance, under lath. When planted outside, an eastern exposure is to their liking, where they get morning sun but are shielded from the afternoon heat.

PESTS

B.T. (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) is the treatment of choice for budworm infestation. Apply it every 7 to 10 days. It will wash off in rain or overhead watering. Use insecticidal soap sprays for infestation of soft-bodied insects such as aphids, white fly, soft scale, and others and use strictly according to directions.

SHAPING

Pinch back new growth where needed or prune if heavier trimming is necessary to promote well-shaped and attractive plants. Many of the newer varieties are self-branching and do not require heavy pruning. Potted plants may be rotated a quarter turn in the same direction to ensure a more symmetrical plant.