

# **January Geraniums**

**By Zelpha Boyd**

Gallatin Empire Garden Club Member

After the glitz of the holidays, with all the bright greens and reds, our January homes are in need of some bright colors. I've discovered that by taking Geranium cuttings in late summer, I can have blooming house plants in January.

Underrated as a house plant, the common Geranium can be the winter gardener's best friend. Remember years ago when the Magpie was suggested as perfect nominee for the state bird? It was recommended that it replace the Meadowlark because it stays around all year, not wimping off into the warmer climate for the winter.

Compare the Geranium to the Magpie; these flowering plants stay with us all year long, growing under conditions not right for other house plants. They don't complain about being allowed to dry out or become limp when water is scarce. Unlike daintier plants, they'd rather die than admit something is lacking.

Our common geranium is a Pelargonium—a tender shrub or herbaceous flowering plant. Shrubby varieties are found native in South Africa. The herbaceous varieties are found in Asia Minor and Syria. The Pelargonium is a name derived from pelargos or stork, from the shape of the flower, which resembles the beak of a stork.

The Geranium is easy to grow; being at home in the kitchen window, in a flowerbed, as a container plant, or in the rock garden. Cuttings may be taken at any time. When a plant becomes too leggy, simply prune it back. This encourages new growth, creating a healthier, compact specimen, and provides cuttings with which to start new plants. (It's a good rule to take no more than a third of the plant at one time.)

Trim the cuttings four to six inches, stripping off all but the few top leaves. Lay these cuttings aside in a dry atmosphere for a few hours, or even a few days. This allows for a corky skin to form over the fleshy end of the stem making it less apt to rot before taking root.

**Dip the end of each cutting in a rooting hormone, such as Rootone ®, and poke into a container of your prepared potting soil. Water the pots thoroughly and cover for a few days. When new leaves appear, you'll know that the cutting is on its way to becoming a blooming plant.**

**A warm sunny windowsill will work, but the ideal place for your new little plants is in a tray on a heating mat, with fluorescent gro-lights overhead.**

**Come the first of June, you'll have many new bedding plants for the outdoors. In the fall move plants indoors, take cuttings and begin the process all over again.**

**Here's to a happy and colorful January!**

