

TOM'S GARDEN

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Zonal Geraniums

What's the difference between a zonal geranium and a regular geranium? Zonal geraniums are propagated by cuttings, while regular geraniums come from seed.

Zonal geraniums are genetically advanced plants, propagated to produce sturdy, stronger zoned leaves, and stronger flowers.

The term "zonal geranium" refers to the plant known as *pelargonium x hortorum*. A zonal geranium has round to kidney-shaped leaves, and some have a darker circular mark on them.



Zonal Geranium from cutting

Do zonal geraniums come back year after year?

In our area of Northeast Ohio, they are grown as annuals, but can be perennial in warmer climates. They can be overwintered here by bringing containers indoors and used as houseplants for the winter or by letting them go dormant in a cool, dark

area. You can also take cuttings from your plants in the fall, root them in potting soil and bring them indoors. I loved the neon colors of mine this past season and took cuttings from those plants. I brought them in the house after it got too cold outside and put them under LED lights. They bloomed all winter and were a great source of joy.



Tango Neon Purple

Geraniums need at least 6 to 7 hours of sun whether in containers or planted in the ground. They will grow to about 18 inches tall and wide by the end of summer.

Fertilize monthly with 5-10-5 low nitrogen fertilizer. Avoid botrytis by spacing properly, not wetting the foliage and removing spent flowers and leaves.

Seed grown plants will be virus-free and can be found in many different colors. Orbit, Maverick, Ringo, Bandit, and regalia are some varieties. Black Magic contrasts dark foliage with pink and white flowers.

Geraniums traveled from South Africa and were cultivated and marveled over in glass houses by the early 1600s, and we love them still for their varied beautiful leaves and many flower colors.



Black Magic

Pelargonium x peltatum

The ivy leaved geranium has pendulous branches loaded with flowers and works well in containers and hanging baskets.

Scented geraniums (*Pelargonium citroellum*) have leaves that smell like roses or lemons and are classified and grown as herbs.

Scented geraniums offer a summer of scent, best placed in sun and where you can pick a leaf or two and enjoy their sensational fragrance. Be sure to grow in freely draining soil or in clay pots with good drainage and allow the soil to dry out between waterings.

Scented types do fine when planted in the ground with summer rains not harming them. Flowers are produced in late spring and early summer. Prune after flowering to shape the plant and prepare for bringing indoors in late fall before frost. Place in sun in a cool room of the house around 60 degrees. Scented geraniums also can be propagated by cuttings.

Get Your Soil Ready for Spring

Now is the time to improve your soil for the coming growing season. Adding organic matter such as compost, manure or leaf mold will improve soil structure and feed the microbes that live there. A layer of this material can be worked into the top 3 inches of soil or left on top around perennials where earthworms will go to work and break it down. Mulching also helps to lock in moisture by reducing evaporation.

Regular mulching is an important part of the no-till gardening method. Avoiding tilling the soil results in a healthy ecosystem where microbes and worm paths remain undisturbed. Weeds can be hoed off or dug up without bringing new weed seeds to the surface and the mulch deprives weeds of sunlight.

Mountain Mint

If you want to attract pollinators to your yard, Virginia mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum virginianum*) should be considered. The small white flowers are irresistible to pollinating insects. The tiny flowers bloom for more than a month in summer and it is amazing how well they attract pollinators.

Mountain mint is a herbaceous perennial native to Eastern North America. It will grow 2 to 3 feet tall and likes full sun and well-draining soil. It has narrow, opposite simple leaves, on wiry, green stems.



Virginia mountain mint

The foliage gives off a minty aroma when crushed. Mountain mint is deer and rabbit proof, and leaf-eating insects avoid it. It will die back to the ground in winter and return to life in spring.

This plant is host to numerous bees, beetles, butterflies, and pollinating flies. If you thought you were familiar with insects in your garden, think again!

Mountain mint will bring in pollinating insects you have never seen before. It opens a whole new world that your other flowers don't attract.

The plant will be a small bush with attractive foliage when not in bloom. Seed heads will be produced in fall and the seeds can be planted for the next year.

The root system has rhizomes extending out a short distance from the plant. Growth can be easily controlled, and it is not invasive like some of the other mints. New shoots appear each spring and can be cut with a spade to control growth.

Virginia mountain mint is not particular to soil type, it can grow in soil from sandy to clay. It likes average moisture and will survive an occasional drought. This plant does not require any fertilizer, it will grow well in unfertilized native type soil.

Some Planting Advice

Butterfly Bush (BUDDLEIA)

Best planted in average, well-drained soil in full sun. Becomes leggy if not grown in full sun. Does not perform well in wet, poor draining conditions. In zone 5 and 6 it will die to the ground in winter and form new shoots in spring. Mark this plant because it emerges late, and you may think it has died.

Cat Mint (NEPETA)

This fast-growing perennial does very well when planted in well-drained soil in full sun. A lean soil and dry growing conditions will bring more flowers and a stronger scent. Too much fertilizer will make it grow more flimsy foliage. Cut back after the first flush and it will flower again in late summer. This plant is very deer resistant.

Dahlia

Plant tubers after the danger of frost has passed. Dahlias prefer a well-drained soil and full sun. Dahlias will grow just fine on their own, but pinching or topping will give you a stronger, bushier plant. The best time to pinch is when the plant is between 12-16 inches tall and has at least four sets of leaves on the center stalk.

Daylily

Daylilies will tolerate just about any well-drained soil. For best results work in some compost or manure. One application of high nitrogen fertilizer in spring is usually enough. Daylilies are vigorous perennials that will last for many years with little or no care.

