

Our daily ritual has been on again, off again, on again, off again. Trying to outfox Mother Nature takes a lot of work. For the past month Rita and I have been covering at night and uncovering in the morning our planter filled with beautiful red-orange geraniums. Thus far, we've been successful keeping these magnificent flowers in bloom, but we realize colder temperatures are inevitable. Eventually the blankets we use to cover them will no longer protect these tender beauties from the killing frost.



This past spring we purchased and planted nearly thirty geranium plants in this particular planter. At roughly five dollars a plant, that added up to a sizeable investment. Although we've enjoyed their beauty for the past five to six months, it saddens us to think they will soon die, let alone the financial loss their death creates. It's time we take a new course of action.

Geraniums are actually perennials—but not in Nebraska. In areas where frost does not occur, geraniums continue to grow year round. In order for geraniums to survive our winters, they must be propagated vegetatively and transferred indoors.

Our plan involves three procedures. First, we will entirely lift a few of the plants, replot them and actively grow them indoors. Secondly, we will take cuttings from which we will start new plants, and thirdly, we will uproot the remaining plants and store them in the basement.

By following these three procedures, we should be able to have plenty of planting stock for next spring. Furthermore, these techniques will considerably reduce the cost for next season, and the plants we carry over will have the exact same qualities of the plants we enjoyed this season.

- (1) Before lifting and potting geranium plants, cut back about one-third of the original height of the plant. Use six-to-eight inch pots or larger to allow for adequate root growth. Use a quality potting soil; avoid using garden soil. A quality rooting medium provides good drainage and minimizes the spread of disease. Immediately after potting, water thoroughly and place the plants in an area that is well lighted but out of direct sunlight. Continue to care for the plants as any other houseplant. Fifty-five to sixty degrees F. is the best temperature for growing geraniums indoors. Warmer temperatures may result in spindly plants.

- (2) Cuttings should be taken from the tips of the plants. Shoots should be three-to-four inches in length with the lower leaves removed. Dip the cut end of the shoot into a rooting hormone; then, place the cut end into a pot which holds three-to-four inches of quality potting soil. The pot should have good drainage. Water thoroughly and cover the container and its contents with a clear plastic covering. Place in a brightly lighted location but out of direct sunlight. A geranium cutting should develop roots within four to six weeks. When planting more than one cutting, avoid having cuttings touch to minimize disease spread. Once the cuttings are rooted, remove the plastic cover and provide for air movement to prevent the spread of disease. Continue to water when needed. Keep plants well lighted and hold temperatures near fifty-five to sixty degrees F.
- (3) Uproot the geranium plants, shake the soil from the roots, cut off one third of the tops of the plants, and carry the plants indoors. Store them either by hanging upside down in a dark room or placing the plants upside down in a paper bag. Storage temperature should be near forty-five to fifty degrees. Although this method has a higher mortality rate than the first two techniques, some plants may survive. The following spring, cut away half the original height of plant, soak the roots in water for an hour or two, then repot either indoors or directly plant outdoors after the threat of frost is gone.

Winter storage of geraniums can be accomplished by following any or all of these three propagation techniques. Finally, no more on again, off again, on again, off again.

Saving Geraniums 3 Methods



The image illustrates three methods for saving geraniums during winter. The 'Potted' method shows several geranium plants in terracotta pots on a wooden deck. The 'Bagged' method shows several brown paper bags filled with geranium plants, with one bag labeled 'Columbian Geraniums 2012' and a date '11/6/12'. The 'Cuttings' method shows a clear plastic container filled with soil and several geranium cuttings.

Potted

Bagged

Cuttings