

Overwintering Geraniums

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Geraniums are one of the most outstanding plants grown in the home garden. They are a very popular plant, so much so that the Penn State Cooperative Extension Service says that \$1.00 out of every \$5.00 spent on bedding plants in the United States is for geraniums. Many gardeners like to keep their geraniums from one year to the next. This provides blooming plants in the home during the winter and reduces the costs of new plants the next spring. Removing cuttings is one way to carry the plants from year to year. In the fall, just prior to frost stem cuttings sometimes referred to as “slips”, can be removed from the tip of the parent plant. They should be three to four inches long, however, shorter ones can be taken if necessary. Strip off the lower leaves to allow sticking the cuttings into a rooting medium. Coarse sand alone or mixed equally with sphagnum peat moss is an ideal medium for rooting cuttings. Before placing cuttings in pots, dip them in a rooting hormone to speed the rooting process.

Place the cuttings in the medium and water thoroughly. Set them in a north or east window until rooted. This generally takes from three to four weeks. During this time, water sparingly—just enough to keep the cuttings from shriveling. The trick to successful rooting is to run the cuttings dry. After cuttings have been rooted and potted, they should be placed in a well lit spot such as a south window. This could be a basement window if you are not particularly interested in them flowering, but just maintaining them until spring.

The plant that remains after the cuttings have been removed can then be dug from the garden and potted. Cut the plant back to about 1/3 of its original height, and pot up in a soil-less potting mix. The size of the pot to use will be determined by the size of the plant. After potting, water thoroughly. Begin fertilization in about a week and thereafter, every two months. This same schedule should also be followed for the rooted cuttings.

One of the old but successful methods of carrying geraniums over the winter is to dig entire plants prior to frost, shake off the soil, and hang them from the rafters in the

basement. Years ago fruit cellars were quite common and they made an excellent place to hold the plants. Basements were generally cool and moist and this method was very successful. Today, it may still be done this way provided the basement is not as warm as the living area of the house. Since there is no sure way of knowing whether this will work in your basement, why not try it if you don't want to make cuttings or pot the plant? Don't be surprised when the leaves start to dry up and fall off. This is normal under the circumstances and will not cause any problem.

In March, the plants that were hung in the basement should be taken down. Cut them back to about 1/3 of their original height, then plant in pots and put in a sunny window. If the plants show signs of having dried out or are rotting, don't pot them up, just discard them.

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