



While discussing the Hortorum or Zonal group of geraniums last week we refrained from mentioning a superb class known as the dwarfs and miniatures.

These plants are perhaps the most welcome additions to the window garden because of their size and blooming characteristics. The miniature varieties usually grow no higher than six to eight inches, have densely arranged leaves, and are rarely without blooms.

They may be grown in three or four inch pots and hence take little room on the windowsill where for the plant enthusiast, room is always at a premium.

The dwarfs grow to about twelve inches and are easily accommodated in four inch pots. Their habit is much the same as the miniatures except for height — a bit taller. Both these kinds of geraniums come in a multitude of colors — from white deep red — there being a host a hundred hybrids in this classification.

The second major group within the Pelargonium genus consists of the Pelargonium x domesticum hybrids, otherwise known as the Lady Washington, Martha Washington, or Pansy geraniums. Without a doubt these are the most showy of the geranium tribe.

The individual flowers are from three to five inches across and come in two- to three-color blends. Unlike the Zonals, which can bloom year-round, these geraniums are seasonal from spring to summer. Also, unlike the Zonals, these plants are better kept from year to year rather than making fresh cuttings each summer.

The culture for the Lady Washington geraniums differs in some crucial aspects from the common geranium. Never fertilize while the buds are being formed since this will promote more vegetative growth rather than more flowers.

After the plant blooms, cut it back severely. (These cuttings may be rooted in the manner described last week.) Mist the plant daily and cut back on regular watering until new growth has started. At this time it is best to remove the plant from the pot, prune back the roots, add some good potting soil, and put the plant in a six inch pot. With this treatment, these geraniums will give you much enjoyment for many years. Remember also to water these plants more frequently than common geraniums.

The third major group of geraniums are the ivy-leaf type or, correctly, hybrids of Pelargonium peltatum. These plants are fast growing, bloom extraordinarily well (especially during the summer), and are unexcelled for hanging baskets.

The culture of the ivy geraniums is similar to the

common geranium though they need more water since they are such rapid growers. If they are grown as a hanging plant, remember that plants grown in this manner usually dry out faster than windowsill plants because of the greater air movement they experience.

It is best to pinch back the ivies during the late winter to encourage good branching. The varieties with deep colors are better grown in full sun while those with lighter colors will do well in semi-shade.

The ivy geraniums are easily propagated from cuttings in the manner described previously. For the best summer show, three or four small plants of the same variety planted in a ten or twelve inch basket will be a beauty in the eye of every beholder for the whole summer.

The last group of geraniums to which we will make reference contains the large number of individual species collectively known as the scented geraniums. A full discussion of this group would take up much more space than is allotted here. The scented geraniums are most specific Pelargonium species whose distinguishing characteristics are varieties of leaf forms and leaf fragrances as well as varied growth patterns. Herin lies a wealth of enjoyment for the plant collector.

The leaf patterns alone are fascinating, anywhere from a maple leaf shape to some which resemble ferns. The fragrances elicited from the leaves are usually enjoyed by slightly bruising the leaf by rubbing it between the fingers and inhaling the aroma. What actually happens is that the finger breaks the oil glands of the leaf thereby exuding the fragrances too are many: ginger, coconut, rose, Idmon, apple, nutmeg, etc.

The culture of the scented geraniums is similar to the Hortorum taking into account the growth pattern of the plant. Some grow in an upright manner as does the common geranium, others as trailing plants like the ivy-leaf.

As an added bonus to the leaf shapes and scents, these geraniums have flowers also. Some are as showy as the common geranium while others have small though interesting bloom of special interest to the botanical collector.

It is of interest that in some countries the leaves of some scented species are used as salad components. Also some leaves are so fragrant that they are hung in closets to freshen the clothes.

Having taken this short junket through the remarkable world of the Pelargonium, it is perhaps not difficult to understand that there are avid geranium fans who devote the whole of their plant collections to Geraniaceae.

NEXT WEEK: Geranium diseases and insect pests.



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