

Did You Know?



Pelargonium, *Pelargonium* spp.

- There are more than 250 pelargonium species which include a diverse group of plants with variety of growth habits. Not all have scented leaves but this publication will be focused on those that do and have herbal uses.
- Most pelargoniums are native to the warm, dry climate of southern Africa. Some are from eastern Africa, New Zealand, the Middle East, and the islands of Madagascar, St. Helena, and Tristan de Cuhna.
- The leaf fragrances may be categorized into these scent groups: citrus, fruit and nut, mint, rose and pungent. Examples include peppermint, lemon, lime, strawberry, nutmeg, apple, ginger, and rose. Often there are a number of cultivars in each category.
- Leaf shape and texture also varies among scented pelargoniums to include rough, sticky, soft, smooth, fuzzy textures and shapes that are dissect like ferns, oak or grape leaf shaped, nearly round, big or small and have smooth or wavy edges.
- Naturalists and plant collectors collected scented pelargoniums early in the 17th century. They were first cultivated in England and became very popular in England in the 1800s.
- Rose geranium oil became an inexpensive substitute for rose oil in the French perfume industry.
- Scented pelargoniums are most often propagated by stem cutting, though they can also be propagated by root division, and leaf cuttings as well. They can also be grown by seed, but the resulting plant will not be an exact clone of the parent.
- In general, grow pelargoniums in a well-draining soil mix in full sun. Some, like the peppermint pelargonium, *Pelargonium tomentosum*, will do better in part shade. Plants in distress in climates with high summer heat may also thrive with some mid-day shade.
- Maintain healthy plants by allowing the soil dry between waterings, fertilize with a balanced fertilizer twice a month during the growing season, switching to a bloom boosting fertilizer when plants are starting to bud.