

MeadowSweet

Herbs & Flowers

MeadowSweet Herbs & Flowers Monthly Newsletter

Nov 2017

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Event Dates

- ⇒ **5 Nov**, Orewa Market
- ⇒ **12 Nov**, Garden Tour.
MeadowSweet welcomes Kai-rara Biodynamic Garden Group
- ⇒ **19 Nov**, Orewa Market.
- ⇒ **26 Nov**, Garden Tour.
MeadowSweet welcomes Hobsonville Herb Group and Norwest Garden Club
- ⇒ **1 Dec**, I have 3 speaking engagements at the New Zealand Gardening and Flower Show



Garden: Spring

It has been a long, and quite wet spring. Even as I'm typing this, I'm still in a warm jumper... But when the sun comes out to play long enough, I can definitely feel the heat that is brewing up for summer! It was a balmy 21°C on Sunday up on the Hibiscus Coast!

Despite the colder spring weather and the wetter ground (apparently we surpassed our yearly rainfall early in August already!), gardening is going ahead full steam.

I have put my tomatoes in long before traditional Labour Day, and they are thriving. Zucchini are producing already, and the herbs and lettuces are growing superbly well. I'm just putting in my chillies, pumpkins, cucumbers, more heritage beans, and melons now, and adding some beetroot to the vegetable garden.

Herb-wise the horseradish is showing lovely leaf growth, as is the French tarragon, and a large lot of elecampane, while the creeping or prostrate winter savory is running wild in my bean garden at the moment! One thing I have been battling with is basil — all of them (sweet, purple, lettuce leaf, Thai, cinnamon, lemon and lime) — they are just not coming along yet... but hopefully soon!

As always—if it isn't raining—keep up with watering, especially in pots. Remember that with all this lovely leafy profusion, comes a need for vigilant pest control. Snails and slugs remains problematic, and how to get rid of them, an often asked question from home gardeners. I have found that a mixed approach works best... with a nightly hunt the only way I have been able to keep the numbers down in my own garden.

I read an interesting tid-bit in an old Farmer's Almanac on mulching, and thought it would be good to share. Mulching is often advised to new (and seasoned) gardeners, and being only second in importance to organic gardeners with composting holding first place. While



it does have its place, for sure, in helping weed control, keeping moisture in, ensuring even soil temperatures, and breaking down into nutrients for the soil, it is important to remember to mulch only when the soil has had some time to warm up—so not early in spring, but rather early in summer.

See my [gardening calendar](#) (link) for more sowing and planting

Plant of the Month: Scented Pelargoniums



Often called scented geraniums, these tender evergreen perennials do belong to the geranium family, but are actually in a separate species altogether — *Pelargonium*.

These shrubby plants are easy to grow, very decorative and gorgeously scented, so they have become very popular garden plants across the globe.

Over 90% of the genus hails from South Africa, but it is now cultivated worldwide.

Uses



Culinary

The scented leaves of many of the pelargoniums have been used to impart a subtle flavour to jellies, cakes, sugars, vinegars, creams, and even teas, liqueurs, and coffees.

While the leaves are generally discarded after infusing, the flowers are wholly edible and can be added to decorated cakes, biscuits, or in mixed salads or fruit cups.

While I cannot imagine anyone relishing in all the available scented pelargoniums for food (e.g. citronella scented), rose, nutmeg, ginger, nut, peppermint and lemon have all proven to be quite popular flavourings.

Household & Garden

Dried leaves are often added to pot-pourri, while the live plants may be helpful in the garden to deter certain animals (mainly with regards to deer), and to repel unwanted insects (like mozzies), or attract pollinators.

They are great companion plants to almost any vegetable, so a bonus to grow in your edible patch—particularly noted for corn, roses, grapes, and cabbage.



Medicinal

When we speak of pelargoniums for medicine, it is the rose scented one, or *Pelargonium graveolens*, that is used.



It is a very good **astringent** and is often used as a cosmetic herb for cleaning and refreshing, specifically restoring balance to oily or dry skin and hair.

With strong **antiseptic, antibiotic and antifungal** properties, it has a long history of use topically on bruises, cuts, scrapes, eczema and hemorrhoids, as well as for nail fungus, sunburn and varicose veins. It can be taken internally to boost the body defenses during a cold/flu.

One of the most favoured uses for rose pelargonium, in either aromatherapy or as a herbal tea, is its **sedative** action. Soothing and relaxing, it calms you in



times of stress and anxiety, insomnia or restlessness. It has also been noted for PMS or menopausal symptoms.

It may be used as an **anti-inflammatory**, easing the aches of muscles or sore joints, and is beneficial for dealing with internal inflammation of the gut and cardiovascular system.

The **analgesic** ability of this pelargonium has made it a popular traditional remedy for mild headaches and other injuries.

It is also currently being studied for its high anti-oxidant levels, as an **anti-cancer** herb and to promote kidney health and general detoxification.



As a pure essential oil, it is known as Geranium Oil, and is very often used in aromatherapy for enhancing positivity and uplifting, while calming and relaxing.

It is generally used topically in skin care only when diluted with base oils.

Cultivate

Scented pelargoniums make fantastic garden plants with their assortment of fragrances, and the range of shapes, textures, sizes and colours of their leaves, and even if their flowers are not as showy as ornamental geraniums, they still are attractive enough in their own right.

Scented pelargoniums can find a space in your garden as part of the flower border, in the vegetable patch, as part of your herb garden, or in patio pots, or even hanging baskets.

Climate

Pelargoniums don't do well in extreme cold, and normally don't survive a hard

frost. If you have a temperate or subtropical climate however, they rarely need any coddling.

Don't despair if you live somewhere with colder winters though, pelargoniums are easily grown in hothouses, or in pots on sunny balconies. Some people even prefer propagating them new as annuals each year.

Site and soil

A full sun position is needed to encourage essential oil production, and flowering, but even so, a site where there is dappled shade, or late afternoon shade would do just as well.

They do well in almost any free-draining soil, but have more fragrance in soil that is slightly poor, and slightly acidic.

Water & Feeding

Pelargoniums are drought tolerant and only need to be watered occasionally. They don't really need any extra fertilising at all.

Pruning

Plants can get scraggly and woody after a while, so it is a good idea to trim them to keep them in shape. Some varieties can grow to be quite large shrubs, quickly outgrowing their allocated space if not kept pruned.

They are very easily propagated from cuttings.



The name *Pelargonium* comes from the Greek *πελαργός*, *pelargós* (stork), because the seed head looks like a stork's beak.

Varieties

Modern hybridization has seen an influx of an amazing assortment of fragrances available to the public in the scented pelargoniums. From soft florals to pungent spiciness, or those reminiscent of fruits and other herbs.

Here are a few that I currently grow at home, and in my nursery.



Rose



Citronella



Nut



Nutmeg spice



Ginger (Toronto)



Lime



Mabel Grey (Lemon)



Lemon



Rosy-mint



Chocolate



Peppermint



Pelargonium
sidoides
Not fragrant, but
medicinal



Recipe Share

Rose Geranium Facial Mist

- Distilled water
- Witch hazel
- Rose water
- Coconut water
- Rose Geranium pure essential oil

1. Fill a spritzer bottle with 1/3 distilled water, and add 4 Tbsp each witch hazel and rose water, 2 Tbsp coconut water and 3-5 drops of pure rose geranium oil.
2. Shake before use, spritz face for a refreshing and hydrating lift. <http://roomfortuesday.com/diy-rose-and-geranium-hydrating-face-mists/>



Lemon Geranium Cheesecake



For the filling:

- 150ml double cream
- 20 lemon geranium leaves
- 5 sheets leaf gelatin, softened in a bowl of water
- 150ml soured cream
- 300g tub cream cheese
- 60g caster sugar
- 2 large egg whites
- Lemon geranium leaves and flowers and violas, to decorate.

For the base:

- 175g digestive biscuits
 - 90g unsalted butter, melted
1. Base: Crush the biscuits, mix in the melted butter and press into tin. Refrigerate to set.
 2. Filling: Warm cream with torn geranium leaves in a pan until simmering. Turn off the heat and leave for 30 mins to infuse. Strain off and discard the leaves. Reheat the cream and add the gelatin, whisking well until dissolved. Pour into a large bowl, add soured cream, cream cheese and sugar. Beat until smooth.
 3. Whisk egg whites to soft peaks and fold a third into the cheese mixture, then fold in the rest. Spoon the mix over biscuit base and chill until set.
 4. Bring to room temperature 30 mins before serving, and decorate with lemon pelargonium leaves and flowers, and violas.

<http://www.goodtoknow.co.uk/recipes/496019/lemon-geranium-cheesecake>