

# Cowboy creates bonsai geraniums

John Wendland of Royal Oak, the Geranium Cowboy, always wears a fresh geranium in his cowboy hat. He does more than wear them; he is a real craftsman when it comes to growing these flowers. He has been a plant lover for many years. He said he learned to love nature mostly from his mother who loved flowers.

His greenhouse is used from April on through the season. A lot of plants are started in the basement and finished in the outdoor greenhouse. Impatiens and begonias are also used extensively in his garden as they blend well with geraniums and choke out the weeds, which results in low maintenance.

Wendland talked about the history of his favorite flower. Pelargoniums are cultured geraniums — they have two sets of different sized petals. True geraniums have 5-7 identical petals and longer stamens.

In the 1500-1600s merchant sailors brought the geranium from South Africa to Europe and England. Botanists cross-pollinated these plants and started to develop thousands of different kinds and just called them geraniums.

During Queen Victoria's reign these flowers were very popular in England. Unfortunately no records were kept as to the number of varieties developed then. Around 1700 a French biologist noticed the difference in the shape of the flowers and realized the classification had been wrong.

The plants are all in the same family, Geraniaceae. Cranesbill is a name for the perennial geranium — the real geranium. One species blooms in April/May with purple blooms. Another, Herb Robert, has a pinkish bloom and grows profusely in this area. It has very shallow roots. All seed geraniums offered now by nurseries are dwarf. Pelargoniums are stork's bills, which refers to the shape of the seed pod.

Wendland has developed his own system for creating bonsai plants. He said he usually uses the scented pelargoniums. Many varieties are fashioned into bonsai and an extensive collection has resulted. Wendland will again display these specimens at the Detroit Institute of Arts "Arts and Flowers" show in April 1989. And what a display it is.

He creates these bonsai (which means attack) by laying the small pots of the plants on their sides, trimming out the excess when they are 3-5 inches high. As they grow he continues to turn the pots and trim the plants. He uses a professional soilless mix Formix BX.

Wendland had lots of advice for geranium growers. If you wish to keep your plants over the winter months, pot them up and put them in a cool sunny window (ideal temperature 55-60 degrees) or in a cool spot in the basement. Water about once a month and bring them out early in the spring and water well. Fertilize every third or fourth week.

For cuttings, follow general procedures, using a mix of three parts Canadian peat and one part each of perlite and vermiculite (or two parts vermiculite). Put the cuttings in indirect sun for 4-5 days and then in a sunny window. In the spring and summer it will take 3-4 weeks to get the roots established. In the fall and winter, double the time. Each time you pot increase the pot size by one inch. Geraniums in the pots like morning sun. It is best to keep them out of direct afternoon sun. Ideal temperature is 65 degrees.

Some geraniums to look for when you are in the market are: Brocade, with a variegated leaf; ivy geranium for hanging plants; Pink Camella, very light pink blossoms; and Sunbelt, a dark plant with a zonal leaf. Zonal means the leaf has a darker green horseshoe print in the middle. A tiny plant, Alpine, with single or double blooms is unique. Sincerity is Wendland's favorite.

Using the variety Apple Blossom Rosebuds Wendland fashioned bouquets and boutonnières for his daughter's wedding several years ago.

He is a member of the International Geranium Society and the Geranium/Pelargonium British Society of England. He is an active member of St. Paul's Lutheran Church Garden Club in Royal Oak.



Geranium Cowboy John Wendland is famous for bringing the wonders of the geranium to the attention of the public. He grows them, talks about them, propagates them, turns them into bonsai and uses them for decoration.

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depth of field, lenses and filters. Each participant will receive a free Kodak book (value \$6.55) plus \$10 in free film processing. Refreshments will be served. Registration fee is \$18.95 per person or \$24.95 per couple.

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