

GARDEN SPOT

Winter nurturing saves plants



MARTY FIGLEY

Haven't the geraniums been outstanding this year? We enjoy the bright as well as the pastel colors of the blooms, but they haven't always been the main attraction.

As early as the 1800s geraniums were used as "carpet bed" plants and were prevented from flowering because the foliage was the most important component in these gardens. The fancy leaves had bands of colors in gold, cream, green and red that provided wonderful contrast to other foliage in the design. One of these old plants still survives, a hybrid, "Madame Sallerei," which never has bloomed!

These geraniums belong to the genus *Pelargonium* and, although they are still called geraniums today, should be called by their botanical name. When the plants were taken from South Africa to Britain, they were called geraniums because they resembled the hardy, herbaceous species of the genus *Geranium*, used extensively in Europe then.

The pretty ivy-leaved one, *P. peltatum*, reached England in 1701, while *P. zonal* (the plants with horseshoe markings on the leaves) arrived in 1710. It is the principal parent of the bedding geraniums — oops! pelargoniums.

It's about time to bring our pelargoniums indoors and I am excited about the successful way Ivan Zador of West Bloomfield has overwintered his plants for four years.

Ivan and his wife, Veronica, grow many beautiful, healthy pelargoniums with different bloom colors on and around their sunny raised deck during the summer. They are all grown in pots or window boxes attached to the deck railing and began their life in four-inch pots. Sometimes Ivan rescues "orphaned" plants and brings them back to luxuriant growth.

Ivan is in no hurry at this time to take the plants indoors. He traditionally waits until after Halloween, unless the temperature drops to 20 degrees, then it's "emergency time." Veronica, their children and friends help carry the pots into the basement and/or to his office.

Other than that time, Ivan said, "It's a slow process."

Before the move, he cuts back the

dead branches and fading blooms but leaves the buds. The pelargoniums growing in the window boxes are transferred to others already in place in the basement. The basement is unfinished, with a cement floor and no additional heating, but it does have a large door-wall that lets in a lot of light, as do the windows in the basement and in Ivan's office where the overflow is stashed. No artificial lighting is used. The pots are turned regularly so that the growth is even.

Ivan keeps a strict routine that never changes as he cares for the flowers throughout the year. The first Sunday of each month the plants are fertilized with Miracle-Gro, mixed according to the package directions, and watered when needed. The plants, he said, "absolutely don't know what they're getting," and apparently aren't aware of the changing seasons.

The Zadors caution readers that the plants do go into a temporary decline and he believes it is caused by the photosynthetic change of less light; they look their worst about Christmas time.

"But don't worry, about January/February they say 'Hey, spring is coming' and they start blooming."

The photographs I saw were ama-



MARTY FIGLEY

Winter watch: Ivan Zador successfully overwinters his pelargoniums.

See FIGLEY, G8

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