

## BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

### Tip of the Week

By Beverly Wickersham

#### "Scented Geraniums"

Scented Geraniums, named Herb of the Year in 2006, are not true geraniums, but *Pelargoniums*, a separate genus in the geranium family whose leaves resemble the geranium but whose flowers are rather insignificant. They were discovered on Reunion Island off the coast of South Africa in the 17th century by botanists seeking rare plants for the royal gardens of Europe. Of the several hundred varieties that originally existed, only about 75 have survived. However, hybridization, especially in the rose group, has yielded many fine new cultivars such as lemon rose and peppermint rose. Cultivation has resulted in more than 100 varieties in an assortment of shapes, flower colors, and perfumes.

The "Scenteds" love the heat and are easy to grow. They may become woody in the first year, which makes them less susceptible to our hot, sometime humid summers. If planted in the flower garden, they prefer full sun. If planted in containers, the small-leaf varieties require small containers; therefore, filtered light is preferable. The large leaf-varieties enjoy a sunny site. "Scenteds" tend to be leggy in growth and require pruning after they bloom. Be sure to leave several leaves on the stalk because that is where the plant will branch out. This is also a good time to repot the plant if needed.

Plant size varies from 12 inches to 3 feet. The flowers are rather insignificant since the leaves produce the scent. The leaves range from 1/2 inch to 3 inches and are green or gray. Their textures range from shiny to fuzzy, sticky or velvety. *Pelargoniums* are reasonably free of pests. However, if mealy bugs appear simply swab them with cotton dipped in alcohol.

Scented Geranium leaves can be used to flavor tea, biscuits, and jelly. To flavor sugar, petals can be alternated with sugar in a mason jar and set in the sun for two weeks, and then sifted out for a delightful flavored sugar. Simply placing Scented Rose Geranium leaves in the bottom of a pound cake pan and pouring the batter carefully over the leaves results in a delicately scented "rose" pound cake. The leaves and flowers can be added to potpourris, sachets, and wreaths.

Here are a few best varieties:

**Small Leaf Varieties:** *P. crispum*--Lemon; *P. xfragrans*--Nutmeg; *P. odoratissimum*--Apple; *P. Xscarborviae*--Strawberry

**Large Leaf Varieties:** *P. graveolens* cultivars: "Camphor Rose"--Rose, "Joy Lucille"--Peppermint, "Robers Lemon"—Lemon

You will be glad you have branched into the scented geraniums when you try them! Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact [ask.bcmga@gmail.com](mailto:ask.bcmga@gmail.com)

