



# Columbia Nursery

## Overwintering Geraniums in Northwest Montana (Zones 3–5)

A Guide from Columbia Nursery

Geraniums (*Pelargonium x hortorum*) are one of the most popular summer flowers in Montana gardens. While typically grown as annuals, they are actually tender perennials that can be successfully overwintered. With a little effort, you can keep your geraniums alive through winter and enjoy them again next year.

### Why Overwinter Geraniums?

- Save money by reusing healthy plants
- Grow larger, fuller plants the second year
- Preserve special varieties
- Reduce waste and enjoy long-lived plants—geraniums can live for decades with proper care

### Three Ways to Overwinter Geraniums

#### 1. Bring Potted Geraniums Indoors (As Houseplants)

- Bring plants indoors **\*\*before the first frost\*\*** (typically mid-September in NW Montana)
- Inspect for pests like aphids or spider mites; treat with a **\*\*systemic insecticide or neem oil\*\*** before bringing them in
- Cut plants back by **\*\*1/3 to 1/2\*\*** to reduce size and encourage bushy growth
- Place in a **\*\*bright room\*\***—use the **\*\*\*“newspaper test”\*\***: You should be able to read comfortably without turning on a lamp
- Keep temperatures **\*\*cool (below 60°F but above freezing)\*\*** until February
- Water sparingly—**\*\*overwatering is the most common reason for failure\*\***
- Around **\*\*February 15th\*\***, move plants to a **\*\*warmer spot (above 68°F)\*\*** to encourage new growth
- Begin feeding with **\*\*half-strength 20-20-20 fertilizer\*\*** once new growth appears

#### 2. Dormant Storage (Paper Bag or Bare-Root Method)

- Best for saving space or overwintering multiple plants
- Before the first frost, dig up plants and shake off all soil
- Let roots dry for 1–2 days in open air
- Cut back stems to **\*\*6–8 inches\*\***
- Place plants in **\*\*paper bags or cardboard boxes\*\***; staple or tie the bags shut
- Store in a **\*\*cool (45–55°F), dry, and dark location\*\*** like a basement (avoid attics due to temperature swings)
- **\*\*Check monthly\*\***: Mist stems lightly if they appear shriveled. Cut away any moldy or rotted spots and leave bags open for a day or two to dry out

#### 3. Take Cuttings for New Plants

- Take **\*\*3–5 inch cuttings\*\*** from healthy stems before frost
- Remove lower leaves and dip the cut end in **\*\*rooting hormone\*\***



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- Plant cuttings in **moist potting soil or seed starting mix**
- Keep cuttings **warm (65–75°F)** in bright indirect light
- Mist regularly to maintain humidity
- By spring, you'll have new plants ready to transplant

## Spring Care: Getting Geraniums Ready for Outdoors

- Around **March 1st**, take dormant plants out of storage
- Prune away any dried or unhealthy tissue
- Pot in **fresh potting soil** and water well
- Place in a **sunny window** and start feeding with **half-strength fertilizer**
- Allow soil to **dry out between watering**
- Harden off gradually once outdoor temperatures are warm enough (late May–early June)
- Start by placing plants outside for a few hours at a time, gradually increasing time and light exposure over a week

## Quick Reference: Geranium Overwintering Calendar

Task	Timing
Take cuttings	Late August–September
Bring potted plants indoors	Before first frost (Sept)
Start dormant storage	Before first frost (Sept)
Move houseplants to warm bright area	February 15th
Revive dormant plants	March 1st
Move plants outdoors	Late May–Early June

## Tips for Success

- **Don't overwater**—geraniums prefer drier conditions
- **Inspect for pests** and treat before bringing indoors
- Use **grow lights** if natural light is limited
- Keep **dead leaves and flowers cleaned up** to prevent disease
- Remember: **Geraniums can live for decades** with proper care!

## Visit Columbia Nursery

We offer potting soil, grow lights, rooting hormone, systemic insecticides, and all the supplies you need for successful overwintering. Stop by for personalized advice to help your favorite summer flowers thrive year after year!