

The Vernon Nursery

where plants come to life



Growing the Vernon's Way

Full growing instructions for your geraniums and fuchsias

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You've received your new plants

From when I was a small child my life has been all about geraniums ... my grandad and parents were obsessed with them! We all joined in and many happy weekends and holidays were spent trundling off to flower shows all over the country to display our beautiful plants. In time my own interest grew (dreadful pun!) and I joined the family nursery in growing our collection. After many, many years of growing geraniums and a wide range of wonderful plants, I want to share with you all of my tips of success so that you enjoy the best success with your plants.

Some people seem to find plants scary - they seem to think the care and nurturing of them must be difficult so they don't grow them. But you and I know that plants are one of life's greatest pleasures - to watch a plant you have grown yourself burst into flower is wonderful.

And to sit in a garden on a warm summer day surrounded by beautiful colour is to be treasured and enjoyed ... and we know that it's not difficult, don't we!

Follow these simple steps to growing your plants and you'll have no problems ...

- 1.** On receipt of the plants stand them upright and keep a note of their name from the packaging - a plastic label is ideal for this.
- 2.** Pot up the plants into 3.5 inch pots (9 cm if you've gone metric!). Use a general purpose compost, which is easily available, but do NOT use bark based composts as these hold too much moisture and will drown the roots and the plants will die. At this stage add our plant food to the compost - this will bring you better foliage growth and many more flowers ... which is what we all want! I often add about 20% perlite to the compost as this helps get air around the roots - but if it's a loose general purpose compost you won't need to do this to have success - it's helpful but not essential!
- 3.** Make sure the plants are moist at all times but not waterlogged. When they are small they have a little root system so it is only as they grow bigger that they will need more water.
- 4.** Place the plants in a sunny place - the warmer and drier the better. You will get the best results if you can give your plants 'summer' - so a dry, light, bright place will make them happier (goodness, they're like me - they don't like it cold and dark!) If you don't have a greenhouse or conservatory then a sunny windowsill will be absolutely fine.
- 5.** Now for the most difficult bit ... ready? I suggest you remove the first lot of flower buds while the plants are small. As difficult as it is to do, it does mean the plant will put its effort into growing its root system and foliage, rather than putting its effort into flowering ... but, of course, it's not at all easy to remove the flower buds as we're all impatient to see them flowering in all their glory!

Potted Geraniums

... if you have received your geraniums as grown on potted plants then start the care of your geraniums from the care instructions below ... We'll always tell you how to care for your plants as we think the more success you have, the more of our plants you will want to grow - we certainly don't want anyone to lose their plants! The logical approach is that plants like spring and summer conditions so the nearest to these conditions you can give them then the happier they will be.

Light - Most plants follow the rule that the more light they have, the more they will flower. Fuchsias prefer shaded areas but geraniums thrive in sunshine.

Dry Air - Most plants like to be in dry conditions so grow them somewhere bright and light. The plants, like us, need oxygen around their top half and around their root system.

Warmth - Hopefully our summer will provide us with lots of warmth! Don't plant outside until all danger of frost is passed (generally mid-May but do watch the weather reports - one night of frost can destroy a display).

Growing on your plants successfully

Feed – like us, plants thrive by being fed! It's so simple to do and you really will have a much better display. To make life easier we sell a special Geranium Fertiliser which is also ideal for all your flowering plants – more details are shown on the back cover. I really recommend that you do add feed for your plants as their performance is so much better – in the same way that we wouldn't thrive without the nutrition food gives us, so plants need nutrition also to perform at their very best. All you have to do is add the food to the compost at the start of the season and that's it!

Once you've done the above see below where we will give you more advice for the next step to your wonderful display!

Surely this is the most pleasurable part of gardening ... other than sitting out in the garden with a glass of your favourite tippie, enjoying your display! The best time to plant up your display containers & hanging baskets is late April/May time but don't plant them outside until mid to late May depending on your local weather.

Pinching your plants – It's always a good idea to pinch the tips out of all of your plants when you are planting them up – this stops the stems growing in length and produces bushier plants ... and therefore more flowers. Simply nip the tips out as shown. You should do this once when planting in April/May time and if you are planting earlier than this (March time) then you can do one pinch early and another later on. It shouldn't be done later than the end of May or it may delay flowering.



Planting your baskets – Use a general purpose compost – you can add 20% perlite to the compost when you are growing geraniums and this will improve drainage. Don't be afraid to put lots of plants in your baskets – I find the more the merrier – it will look fuller from the start and make a superb display all summer. Add our slow release feed to the compost at this stage – see back cover. Once the basket is planted, put it somewhere warm and light until it is ready to go out late May – don't put it out too early!

Planting your containers – As with baskets, add in lots of plants. I think a basket or tub should be cascading with glorious colour so go to town and plant them up and you'll have a fabulous show of colour all summer long. I did visit a friend once who told me she'd planted up her patio planters (not a gardening friend I hasten to add!) and she'd planted one marigold in each of her patio pots – it was one little plant stuck in a huge pot with a lot of compost on display! I marched her off to buy lots more plants! Fill the planters and containers up for the best display. You can plant them up late April and keep them somewhere warm until May, or keep the plants in pots and plant the containers out in the garden in late May.

Planting your specimen pots – Not quite as awful as it sounds! What I mean is growing plants on their own that are really special and deserve to be shown off. As well as my baskets and tubs I like to display a few single plants in terracotta pots and dot them around in visible places so that we can all really enjoy the beauty of them. A few of the same variety planted together also makes a good impact.

Planting locations – Well it's generally the case that upright plants are planted in the centre and trailing plants are put near to the edges ... well that sounds logical enough doesn't it?! The other thing to remember is that if it goes wrong and you'd like to shift a plant later then you can do so – gently pull the plant out of its position taking care not to tear too many roots and slot it in somewhere else – it'll soon grow new roots and settle into its new place without much bother.

Planting up your displays

Once you've planted up your display you will want it to give you a razzle, dazzle display all summer long. Again - always try to follow the logic that your plants like summer - so giving them the best summer-like conditions will ensure continued success.

Watering - Simple rule - keep your plants moist at all times - not waterlogged and not bone dry - like us, they like a drink every now and then (but they aren't able to act on it - like we do when we think "ooh, I'll put the kettle on ..."!). Watering once a day is fine in warm weather but on very hot days they may need watering twice a day. In hot weather try to do it after the sun has gone down or early in the morning so that you don't lose too much to evaporation. They won't mind being waterlogged at watering time but they must be able to drain so you will need holes in the baskets or tubs - sitting in bowls of water will starve the roots of oxygen and they will drown (what a gloomy thought!). A tip is that if you're not sure about how dry your baskets are then push them from underneath and feel the weight - you soon get used to feeling how light or heavy they are and it's a much more accurate way than poking fingers into the compost. Remember that a plant in the ground can send its roots down to forage for feed and moisture - a basket up in the air is completely dependant on you to care for it! new place without much bother.

Deadheading - You should always take off the old flowerheads as they go over - your plant will send out more beautiful, stunning flowerheads and you'll have a much better display! Gently break the stem off from the main plant - don't just take off the bloom. Removing the whole stem results in the plant throwing more flower buds out so you'll have many more flowers on your plants to burst into bloom. I'm sure you'll agree that deadheading is a very relaxing job to potter about doing in the garden!

Shaping - Some people are scared of touching their plants once they are on display but I think you can do what you like - they're your plants! If you don't like the shape a plant or hanging basket is growing in then snip a bit off! Cut the stem just above where a leaf is growing and the stem will heal over. It's rather like when I go to the hairdresser and apologise for trimming my own fringe ... why do I apologise ... it's MY hair! And these are your plants so as long as you're not cruel you can do what you like!

Taking your own geranium cuttings



Taking a cutting - take a cutting from just above a node (set of leaf joints). This will leave the plant to heal over. Aim for a short cutting of 5-7cm (2- 3") long and take your cuttings from fresh, fleshy stems - cuttings from woody stems won't root.



Trimming the cutting - cut back to just under the next set of leaves. Take off the lower leaves, any flower buds and clean off any stipules (they are the flaky bits of growth!)



Ready to Plant - I dip geranium cuttings in a Vitamin C solution and plant in a moist general purpose compost. Place in a warm, sunny position - if you can add some heat underneath it will speed up the rooting.

Visit www.vernonplants.com and watch our video on how to take geranium cuttings!

In my experience you will always get better success rates from dipping your cuttings into a Vitamin C solution. You can obtain powdered Vitamin C from your chemist - I use half a teaspoon of powder to a couple of egg cups of water. Once mixed store in a brown bottle and only use plastic items to stir (the good old plant label does the trick!). If you cannot get hold of the powder form then dissolve a fizzy tablet in a little water. Make sure the roots are moist but the plant will need fresh, dry air with plenty of light. Regal Pelargoniums make a better plant when the cuttings are taken in September and grown on over winter, ready to be potted up in March time.

Long term care of your geraniums

Once you've had your plants for some time you will want to keep them growing and to keep on enjoying them for many years to come – and here we tell you how to keep them going through every winter. Again it comes back to the fact that plants like summer – so if you are able to recreate summer days in your greenhouse, conservatory or home throughout the whole of winter your plants will be very happy ... but you may well have a HUGE heating bill so a compromise has to be found ...

The first choice you have to make – do you take cuttings from the main plant, dump that and keep the cuttings OR do you keep the main plant growing all winter. If you take cuttings you will, obviously, not need quite so much space as if you keep lots of big plants. If you are going to take geranium cuttings see page 4 (fuchsias page 6) – however, if you have your own method that works then stick with it!

Frost - Your plants will need to be protected from frost at all times - if the stems freeze through the plant will not recover (think of a cucumber once it's been frozen - it simply won't recover!)

Shaping - If you are keeping your big plants going then they will need to be brought in before the frosts hit, so do watch the weather. Clean them up, taking off dead leaves and old flowerheads. I don't recommend that you cut them back until April, unless you have excellent conditions over winter – they may well be fine, but it's a risk – best to wait until April when the days are naturally longer. In early April cut the plants down to a third of their size cutting the stem just above a leaf joint. It's scary as they look awful but the plants will sprout from lower down and you'll have much bushier plants to enjoy. Don't do it any later than late April as this will delay flowering.

During winter the plants will need a dry atmosphere – if you have a greenhouse make sure you open the windows from time to time to let some fresh air in. Electric heaters are ideal as they keep the air dry. The roots should be moist but never waterlogged – aim for keeping them on the dry side although they will need some moisture. Light is very important – if indoors they must be near the window as even if they are only 3 feet in from the window they will receive 50% less light. As they will naturally grow towards the light, try to turn your plants from time to time so they grow evenly.

They do not need a lot of heat but they do need to be kept frost free to survive - if you keep them at the ideal temperature of 5 degrees (41F) they will be happy. If you are growing plants in a greenhouse then do pop out every now and then during winter to check all is fine ... if you don't, you may find that when you DO go out you might find a mouldering, rotting heap!

Take with a “pinch of salt” anything you hear about keeping plants in strange conditions over winter. I am thinking of starting a “Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Plants”. I want to cry when I read of people shoving their lovely plants into boxes and putting them into the garage, wrapping them in newspaper and putting them under the hedge, hanging them upside down in the attic ... under the bed ... etc.! Having said that, if you have a method that works for you then stick with it! But I wouldn't want to be hung upside down in a cold attic all winter!

Troubleshooting

My plants have some whitefly on them ... These don't harm or disfigure the plants at all but are unsightly and we certainly don't want them making their homes on our lovely plants! Interestingly they don't tend to go near the ivy leaf geraniums but they do seem to be attracted to regals and scented. They can easily be treated with a spray of systemic pesticide which can be repeated if they return.

I have some pelargonium rust ... This looks like car rust - if you notice patches on the leaves look at the underside and you may see small brown patches. The advice used to be to throw them all away but thankfully nowadays it can be easily treated with a spray. It doesn't harm the plant but looks unsightly so remove the affected leaves and spray the plant and the compost.

My plant is yellowing and wilting ... The main culprit is usually watering - either over or underwatering - the plant is showing signs of distress. Adjust the watering either way. Also check the compost is loose around the roots as it could be too heavy and compacted so the roots have too much moisture around them and the plant is struggling. It's a good idea to replant it in fresh compost and put it somewhere warm, light and dry.

Growing your fuchsias

Start off by following the same advice as on page 2 and 3 except fuchsias don't like to be in such a sunny position and they are happier in a semi-shady spot.

Stop your fuchsias as shown in the top picture here on the right - this will stop the plant growing any taller and will encourage growth from lower down, making a bushier shaped plant. For summer blooms don't stop any later than the end of April. When planting up use a general purpose compost and dip the cutting in hormone rooting powder (fuchsias only - not your geraniums). Add our geranium fertiliser to the compost - it's ideal for all your flowering plants. Put in a warm, light position out of bright sunshine and you can cover with a plastic bag (but do not do this on your geranium cuttings).

The biggest risk to fuchsias in the summer is scorching - whilst they like light, they do not like to be sitting in fierce, strong sunshine all day (and neither do I!) - choose a shadier position for them. Also they are best outside during the summer months and not in the greenhouse. At the end of a hot day they will appreciate a light splash of water over their foliage, but don't do this if they are in strong sun as they will just burn.

Hardy Fuchsias are only hardy once they have had a chance to get their roots down deep into the ground so plant out into the garden by July at the latest. They may look as though they have died during winter but never fear, they will come back again next spring with fresh new growth. If you have grown a fuchsia into a shape - such as a standard fuchsia - then the whole pot will need frost protection as if the roots freeze through you will lose the plant. Another important factor when growing a standard plant is to ensure it is growing in a very sturdy pot and can't get blown over!

Miniature fuchsias are easy to grow and we recommend you try growing them into little 'standard' fuchsias and displaying them on the patio table - they are lovely and smother themselves in flowers.



This is the point at which you pinch out the tip to "stop" your fuchsia



Taking a cutting from the plant - cut on the stem below a set of leaf joints



Trimming the cutting - take off the lower leaves and the cutting is ready for planting.



Planting

Growing your bare root hardy geraniums

Plant geranium bareroots at the earliest opportunity following delivery. Should soil conditions prevent planting directly into borders (if soil is frozen or waterlogged), perennial geraniums should be potted up, watered sparingly and grown on in a cool position. You can plant directly outside but I always prefer to grow in a pot first and then plant out once established. When planting outside choose a sunny or semi shaded position on moist, well drained soil. Work some compost or general fertiliser into the top 20cm of the soil. Dig a hole wide enough to accommodate the bareroot with its roots spread out and deep enough that the crown of the plant is just a few cm below soil level. Backfill the hole with soil and firm the plant in gently. Water well to settle the soil. Water regularly until fully established. Remove old foliage and faded flower stems throughout the growing season to promote continuous fresh growth. In autumn, cut the foliage back completely. Apply a mulch of well rotted manure to the base of the plant in spring. Lift and divide hardy geranium plants every third year to maintain their vigour.

Care of your hanging baskets ... all year round

Enjoy your hanging baskets all year round ... when the summer basket displays have finished don't leave the baskets idle - replant them with your winter selection!

- 1.** The initial care and planting information is exactly the same as on pages 2 - 4.
- 2.** The main thing to remember with Hanging Baskets is that the plants are completely dependant on you for their water and nutrition - a plant in the ground can send it's roots out to forage through the earth for water or nutrients - a basket up in the air can't send a long root down to the ground! And don't forget to add our plant food to the compost when planting up - as quick as making a cup of tea ... and you'll get tons more flowers!
- 3.** I recommend 10 plants in a medium basket (35-40cm) - the more the merrier ... the more plants, the more blooms to enjoy!
- 4.** Baskets are the same as patio planters - they like to be moist - never bone dry and never sitting in puddles. I recommend a good soaking and then leaving to drain and dry a little until it is moist before watering again. Best to water early in the morning or in the evening to reduce water loss to evaporation.
- 5.** A tip for knowing when your baskets need a drink is to lift them from the bottom and get used to the weight - you'll soon get used to knowing when the basket feels light and so needs a drink - saves trying to poke fingers into a basket up in the air!
- 6.** Enjoy your display!

For lots more growing advice and information visit our website at www.vernonplants.com
We like to share our advice with you ... the more success you have, the more of our plants you will enjoy growing!

Visit our website and watch our video on growing hanging baskets!

Growing your climbing geraniums

These grow long, slender stems and can be easily attached to a trellis or supports as they grow. They will quickly fill with flower and brighten up anywhere - these are particularly ideal in a frost free conservatory as geraniums do not have a dormant period so with lots of light, they will flower all year round.

- 1.** I recommend five growing in a pot together as they will give a much fuller show. Don't plant them into a huge pot straight away - pot up gradually into the next size up each time.
- 2.** You will need to grow with support to tie the stems into, so a frame or pyramid up the centre is ideal or grow against a trellis.
- 3.** As the plants grow, tie in the stems to the support. Do not remove any of the growing tips at the tops of the stems as you want them to grow tall. You can remove the growing tips from side shoots as this will force the plant to branch from lower down and so make a more bushy display.
- 4.** Feed is needed as you want the foliage to grow quickly. Adding our plant food to the compost when you plant up will be best as this has the right balance of nutrients for flowering and also boosts the foliage growth. Keep moist at all times and never waterlogged.
- 5.** Now for the most difficult bit! As the plants are growing and establishing, remove all the flower buds (not easy, I know!). Once the plants have reached the size you want leave them alone to bloom and put on a fantastic show for you! Then just follow the usual care for geraniums ... and enjoy their show!

Some additional watering advice!

A tale of woe...

So Mr & Mrs Overwater received their beautiful healthy, fresh plants from Vernon's, unpacked them and spread them out ready to pot up. The cuttings were quite moist and into their pots they went. "I know" said Mr Overwater "I'll give them a nice drink to settle them in".... and so he gave them a jug of water. The next day, remembering that the plants were new, Mrs Overwater said she'd give them another drink - as they were new they must need a drink and so in went a jug of water. A couple of days later Mr Overwater was reading the paper when he glanced up and noticed the plants on the windowsill. "Oh goodness!" he exclaimed "we've forgotten to water the new plants!" so in went another jug of water. A few days later the plants were beginning to look very sick. "Oh dear" sighed Mrs Overwater "they must need a drink" and so in went a jug of water.

A week later the entire lot were dead - every single one of them. With that Mr & Mrs Overwater grabbed the phone to call Vernon's to claim replacements under their guarantee - obviously it must be their plants that are no good!

OK - we're a bit harsh on Mr & Mrs Overwater but it makes a good point. On the other hand don't forget to water them at all! They like to be moist at all times - never waterlogged and never bone dry - and that is actually a lot easier to maintain than it sounds!

For the rarest, most beautiful plants for all around your garden stick with The Vernon Nursery! We don't only grow geraniums! We have all you need for your borders, beds, containers and hanging baskets to be bursting with beauty. If a plant is not good enough by our high standards then we simply don't offer it for sale. I have found over the years that plants all have their own way and some are a lot easier than others ... and some are a lot more challenging than others! I have learnt through trial and error which are the easiest to grow, giving the best show of colour and we only ever offer these best performing varieties to you. Many growers are wary of letting you into their 'secrets of success' but we believe that the more success and pleasure you have from growing our plants then the more of them you will enjoy growing! We are always more than happy to share our tips and help with any growing advice needed along the way. If you do have access to the internet then do look at our website where there is lots more information and advice. You can easily register for our newsletters where we give month by month best advice for your plants. Happy growing!

Our 100% Guarantee

You can rest assured that we care that our customers are happy and we always strive to ensure your complete satisfaction - we have been posting out our plants for over thirty six years so we are fully experienced in mailing out quality plants. Complaints are very rare but if you are unhappy with anything you receive from us please email us at vernonladies@vernonplants.com or write to us within 28 days of receipt. This gives plenty of time for the plants to get well established and we will then ensure we resolve this with you so that you are 100% satisfied.

Add our feed to your compost when planting ... ideal for all your flowering plants! This feed has the perfect blend of nutrients that flowering plants need so you'll see better foliage and many, many more flowers.



For more information on how to care for any of the plants in the Vernon range, visit www.vernonplants.com Whilst there why not sign up to receive our email newsletters for all our additional hints and tips to make your garden thrive.