Stop 322 Adult Tour – Scented Geraniums, Show House

Since their 17th century introduction from the wilds of South Africa to European and American conservatories, up through the present day - pelargoniums have long been a favorite of gardeners. There are over 200 different species!

Rob: *Pelargoniums are what botanists call them; most gardeners would call them geraniums. Gardeners have been playing with these for hundreds of years, hybridizing them or selecting them to get new forms, new leaf colors, new flower colors.*

And perhaps even a new scent. There are over 100 varieties of scented-leaf pelargoniums alone. Since the 1700’s they’ve been used for aromatherapy, to flavor sugars, and make potpourri’s and sachets. The walkways of Victorian era gardens were lined with pelargoniums, so that when a ladies long skirt brushed against the leaves, their fragrance would fill the air.

As Rob Nicholson relates, the range of scents is remarkable. Rob: *There’s some that have the fragrance of blue cheese; some that have the fragrance of pineapple or peppermint. This one here, pelargonium crispum, has a lemon-scented leaf; it smells just like lemon Pledge.*

For thousands of years humans have used natural botanical scents for everything from perfumes to insect repellents. The essential oil that gives these plants their scent is found in small glands in the foliage and flowers. Sometimes the oils can cause contact dermatitis, which is why we ask you not to touch the plants. Fragrant geranium oil is used in perfumery, for mosquito repellants, herbal skin cream, anti-stress oil, and pharmaceutical applications, as well as for natural seasonings/flavorings. As a folk remedy, geranium oil is used in the treatment of ulcers, as an antifungal and as an expectorant. Because of these wide-ranging benefits, the study of natural fragrant compounds has led scientists to the synthetic production of many of the scents we use today.