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South African Geranium

Pelargonium sidoides



South African Geranium flowers
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Height: 24 inches

Spread: 4 feet

Spacing: 3 feet

Sunlight: ○ ◐

Hardiness Zone: (annual)

Other Names: Umckaloabo

Description:

Long stalked, heart shaped velvety leaves are mildly aromatic; dainty clusters of deep red, nearly black flowers dot the plant all season; perfect for patio containers

Ornamental Features

South African Geranium features dainty clusters of dark red orchid-like flowers with black overtones at the ends of the stems from late spring to early fall. The flowers are excellent for cutting. Its tomentose heart-shaped leaves remain grayish green in color throughout the year.



South African Geranium in bloom
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Landscape Attributes

South African Geranium is an herbaceous annual with an upright spreading habit of growth. Its medium texture blends into the garden, but can always be balanced by a couple of finer or coarser plants for an effective composition.

This plant will require occasional maintenance and upkeep. Trim off the flower heads after they fade and die to encourage more blooms late into the season. It has no significant negative characteristics.

South African Geranium is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Mass Planting
- Border Edging
- General Garden Use
- Container Planting
- Hanging Baskets

Planting & Growing

South African Geranium will grow to be about 24 inches tall at maturity, with a spread of 4 feet. When grown in masses or used as a bedding plant, individual plants should be spaced approximately 3 feet apart. Its foliage tends to remain dense right to the ground, not requiring facer plants in front. Although it's not a true annual, this plant can be expected to behave as an annual in our climate if left outdoors over the winter, usually needing replacement the following year. As such, gardeners should take into consideration that it will perform differently than it would in its native habitat.

This plant does best in full sun to partial shade. It is very adaptable to both dry and moist growing conditions, but will not tolerate any standing water. It is considered to be drought-tolerant, and thus makes an ideal choice for a low-water garden or xeriscape application. It is not particular as to soil type or pH. It is highly tolerant of urban pollution and will even thrive in inner city environments. This species is not originally from North America.

South African Geranium is a fine choice for the garden, but it is also a good selection for planting in outdoor containers and hanging baskets. With its upright habit of growth, it is best suited for use as a 'thriller' in the 'spiller-thriller-filler' container combination; plant it near the center of the pot, surrounded by smaller plants and those that spill over the edges. It is even sizeable enough that it can be grown alone in a suitable container. Note that when growing plants in outdoor containers and baskets, they may require more frequent waterings than they would in the yard or garden.