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Perennial Geraniums

Garden, Lawn & Landscape

Perennial Geraniums Make Great Groundcover Plants

Perennial Geraniums Make Great Groundcover Plants

submitted by Sarah Browning, Nebraska Extension Educator

Hardy geraniums are a great ground cover plant for sunny or partially shaded areas, but they are often confused with the beautiful annual geraniums found at the garden center in spring. Technically, annual geraniums are in the genus *Pelargonium*, while the hardy geraniums are true Geraniums. However, hardy geraniums are great perennial plants that deserve to be used more in Nebraska gardens.



- *Geranium x catabrigensis 'Biokovo'*
Image from the Perennial Plant Association, <http://www.perennialplant.org/>

Growing

Perennial geraniums are easy to grow. Most perform best in full sun to partial shade and prefer average, well-drained soil. If the location is too shady, plants will become taller, more open, less compact and they'll bloom less.

Deadhead spent flowers to keep plants looking nice. In spring, remove any dead foliage to get plants ready for another growing season.



- Cranesbill - purple flowers with darker veins of *G. sanguineum*.

Garden-worthy Geraniums

The Geranium genus contains over 250 different species, but here are a few All those mentioned below are hardy to at least Zone 4.

G. endressii 'Wargrave Pink', commonly known as Endress' geranium, is a vigorous plant with salmon-pink flowers held above the mounded foliage. The leaves are 3-5 inch wide, shiny green and deeply divided. Plants flower from early summer through fall. Height 15-18 inches.

G. himalayense 'Gravetye' is also known as lilac geranium. Plants grow 12 inches in height. This cultivar is more compact and less unruly than others in the species. In fall, the foliage turns bright orange and red. Plants have the largest flowers, 2 inches across, in a bright blue coloration with reddish centers and dark veins.

G. sanguineum, is commonly known as bloody cranesbill and is the most often planted type of perennial geranium in Nebraska gardens. Plants reach 9-12 inches in height. 'Album' has clear white flowers and grows 8-12 inches tall. 'Alpenglow' has rose-red flowers on 8-inch plants.

'Ankum's Pride' has pink flowers with darker veins. *G. sanguineum* var. *striatum* is often sold under the name 'Lancastriense' or 'Prostratum.' It has a compact growth habit of 6-8 inches tall, with light pink flowers and crimson veins.



- Bloody-cranesbill - red fall foliage color of *G. sanguineum*.

Biokovo Geranium

The Perennial Plant Association (PPA) is a professional horticulture trade organization dedicated to improving the perennial plant industry by providing education to enhance the production, promotion and utilization of perennial plants. Each year PPA selects and promotes the Perennial Plant of the Year. Selection of plants is simple; PPA members nominate plants for consideration and then vote for the best plant, usually out of three or four plants on the ballot. Plants are nominated based on several criteria, such as suitability to a wide range of climatic conditions, multiple seasons of ornamental interest, low maintenance, pest resistance, availability, and ease of propagation.

Biokovo geranium, *Geranium x cantabrigiense* 'Biokovo', is this year's selection, and it also known as cranesbill Biokovo. It is a naturally occurring cross between *G. dalmaticum* and *G. macrorrhizum*, found growing in the Biokovo Mountains in the Dalmatia region of present-day Croatia.

Both parent Geraniums, *dalmaticum* (4-8" height) and *macrorrhizum* (15-18" height), are low growing, ground cover plants. Biokovo geranium follows in their footsteps and makes an excellent 6-10" high ground cover.

It blooms in late spring with 5-petaled white flowers, about 3/4 inches across. The flowers have a pink blush and darker pink stamens, giving the effect of a blushing pink geranium. The foliage is medium green and is semi-evergreen. In fall, the leaves provide a scarlet to orange coloration.

A related cultivar, *G. x cantabrigiense* 'Karmina' has deeper red flowers, almost raspberry in color. Reddish fall foliage coloration

If you've been looking for a pretty groundcover plant, give hardy geranium a try!

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