



# What is the best way to root geranium cuttings...water or soil?



There are several, and often conflicting, steps given for propagating geraniums through cuttings.

You asked, in November, whether it was okay to plant your geranium cuttings started in water (“water babies”). Certainly, plant the geranium cuttings with roots in a potting mix that is well draining. Place these young plants in a sunny window (not direct sun) or other area with good artificial light until spring. They can then be hardened off and moved outside. Given geraniums are native to warm climates, some heat is optimum (e.g., 16-24 degrees Celsius).



Information we viewed suggests that the “water” method is less successful than the “soilless media” method for propagating geranium cuttings. For this reason, we decided to provide an overview of considerations when propagating using the soilless media method. (Soilless media are composed entirely of organic materials like peat moss, coconut coir, etc., and do not contain clay, silt, or other inorganic compounds.)

## 1. Take cuttings (sterile knife or hand pruner)

- Late summer, as there is plenty of light and warmth, otherwise a heated propagator and/or grow light may be needed.
- Cut healthy, strong stems close to terminal ends of the shoots just above a leaf joint on main stems (10 cm in length).
- Remove lower leaves and flower buds, leaving one or two leaves at the growing tip.
- Trim stem to just below a node (higher hormones at node).

## 2. Planting

- Using a rooting hormone is optional. Reported success/potential problems varied in literature.
- Recommended pot size varied, but choosing pot sizes to accommodate 3-4 cuttings will minimize the potential spread of disease. Pots should have adequate drain holes.
- Starting medium needs to be very well drained and sterile. Suggestions include seed potting mix, peat-free compost mix with sharp sand to aid drainage, and vermiculite.
- Plant about a ½ of the stem in the potting mix so it is stable, and 5+ cm between plants. Bury any bare leaf nodes from any removed leaves.
- Water until moist (and well drained).
- Place in a well-lit location (but not direct sun), indoors. Optimal temperatures for starting geraniums: daytime: 18-24 degrees Celsius and night time: 13-18 degrees Celsius. (1,2)

## 3. Coverings

- Recommendations vary from not covering (to prevent mildew on leaves) to covering planted cuttings. Suggested covers include placing the pot+cuttings in a plastic bag or under a plastic dome (tall preferred). The purpose is to maintain humidity. If covering the potted cuttings, it is recommended that the covering be opened occasionally to check the soil is damp and to allow for air exchange. If excessive condensation is observed, prop the cover open until condensation evaporates.

## 4. Up-potting

- Up-pot cuttings into individual pots (well draining sterile potting media) when roots develop (6-8 weeks).
- Place pots into a well-lit (natural or artificial) area until spring. Continue to monitor media moisture. See above for optimum temperature range.

## Resources:

1. *Growing geraniums*. (2025). U Mass Extension Greenhouse Crops & Floriculture Program, University of Massachusetts Amherst. <https://ag.umass.edu/greenhouse-floriculture/fact-sheets/growing-geraniums#:~:text=While%20geraniums%20can%20be%20produced,show%20no%20signs%20of%20stress>
2. Thompson, L. (2023). *No Seeds, no problem - how to asexually propagate geraniums*. WSU Master Gardener Foundation (for Chelan-Douglas Counties). <https://chelandouglas.mastergardenerfoundation.org/no-seeds-no-problem-how-to-asexually-propagate-geraniums/>
3. Bous, S. (2023). *How to propagate geraniums in water*. Better Homes & Gardens. <https://www.bhg.com/gardening/flowers/annuals/can-geraniums-be-rooted-in-water>
4. *How do I take geranium cuttings*. (2022). Yard & Garden, Iowa State University Extension & Outreach. <https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu/faq/how-do-i-take-geranium-cuttings>
5. Monty, D. (2023). *How to take geranium cuttings*. BBC Gardeners' World Magazine. <https://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to-grow-plants/how-to-take-cuttings-from-bedding-geraniums> (video)