

## episode 37 show notes and advice

As we enter Autumn and the cold weather, pelargoniums take centre stage and come into their own.

For a family of flowers that boast such wonderful visual flair and incredible scents, they're remarkably low maintenance and high performing. On this week's 'grow, cook, eat, arrange' we're talking all things pelargonium, from those that fill the air with scent to those that bring vibrant colour until November.

### In this episode, discover:

- One of Sarah's favourites, Attar of Roses, and how it's used in so many different ways
- The most productive varieties that stay vibrant from April through to October
- Groups of pelargoniums great for filling your house with incredible scents
- How to take pelargonium cuttings safely

### Links & references:

Order Sarah's new book: <https://bit.ly/2TWHJcz>

Order Arthur's new book: <https://bit.ly/3xOov7H>

Shop on the Sarah Raven Website: <http://bit.ly/3jvbaeu>

Get in touch: [info@sarahraven.com](mailto:info@sarahraven.com)

Follow Sarah: <https://bit.ly/3iDTvBp>

Follow Arthur: <https://bit.ly/3jxSKK5>

## Episode 37 advice sheet

Pelargoniums — large, small, scented, non-scented, house plant and garden varieties

Arthur is a recent convert, but now is getting pretty keen

This has not been the year for them really, as light levels have been low and there has been so little heat and sun. Many are wild plants of South Africa, and it's worth knowing that so you know where they'll naturally thrive — dry, sunny, infertile soils. If you store from one year to the next, you'll get whopper plants, but the younger plants flower more prolifically than the mature older ladies.

They look wonderful in terracotta pots – that’s a great marriage.

At this time of year, bring in as many as you can to your window-ledges. With the others, store frost-free, tidy up the tops and even give them a root prune. This helps with spring health and vigour.

### Our favourites

#### **Pelargonium sidoides**

Delicate, spidery crimson-black with beautiful ruffled, rouché silver leaves like a Spanish dancer’s skirt. It is pretty reliably hardy at Perch Hill, left out in the garden with the frosted top left on until April to give it protection.

#### **P. ‘Attar of Roses’**

Scented leaf pelargonium – rose scented, used widely in the perfume industry, with incredible taste and scent which we use in tisane and cordial. (see cordial recipe below). Fantastic cut foliage for a vase and for autumn and Christmas wreaths.

#### **P. ‘Orsett’**

This is one of Sarah’s favourites for very early flowering, with pink flowers, with crimson splotches. This flowers in the greenhouse here from April to November so gives fantastic value for most of the year.

#### **P. ‘Black Prince’**

Arthur first saw them at Chatsworth. Dracula, dark-red burgundy, similar to ‘Lord Bute’ but less well known and in fact more rich and regal.

#### **P. Shrubland Rose’**

Bright scarlet-pink with a bit of salmon, so maybe not everyone’s favourite colour BUT it is such a hugely long performer. We had it 2 years ago in a large shallow copper on a table in the middle of the Perennial Cutting Garden and it so so earned it’s space as it flowers and flowers on minimal TLC.

#### **P. tomentosum**

The most fabulous variety which thrives in shade and makes the very ,very best house plants, with silver felted leaves that smell of peppermint. Sarah uses this as bath scent. It's a quick-growing pot plant and is so stylish in the house. Evergreen of course, as you walk past it, squeeze a leaf. This also has great shape, it's such a good tumbler so perfect for a high shelf.

## Care

Give them a summer holiday outside, don't keep them in the house all year. Water them outside on the doorstep too.

And Arthur recommends feeding them through much of autumn and even into winter. Remember as South African natives, that's the families natural spring and early summer.

## Taking cuttings

This is a job to do now.

People are often surprised when they walk into our polytunnel at this time of year and see that it's chocker-block with pots of cuttings, which some gardens do in spring.

We find it's now, when many of the tender perennials are growing at full tilt, that they root quickest. Many of the plants we grow here — the pelargoniums, osteospermums, argyranthemums, arctotis, nemesias, and diascia — come from South Africa, and it's in early autumn that they start their main growth spurt, coinciding with their spring. That's just when new plants will root quickest, so propagating now makes good sense, not in our spring.

We also do our Salvias cuttings in September or October, along with plectranthus, calceolaria, cobaea, fuchsias and heliotropes. That's as a result of trialling both times — later seems to give us faster rooting with these few plants.

## Step by step – taking cuttings of tender perennials

Take a short piece of stem from the main plant.

Trim – to just below a leaf joint, so the cutting is 5-6 cm (2 inches) long. Shorter cuttings root better than long ones. Just below a leaf node is where there is the highest concentration of

natural rooting hormone. We don't use rooting hormone powder as we find, all our cuttings root consistently and quickly without.

Strip off all leaves except the top pair. If the top pair of leaves are large, cut these in half across-ways. This seems brutal, but they will stay alive and photosynthesize fine, and with half the surface area, they don't put so much demand on the stem to draw up water to support them.

This makes the cutting more likely to root rather than flop.

Next remove the stem tip. It's at the top that the growth hormone concentrates, so by pinching it out, there's nowhere for it to go but down and encourage root formation.

Fill a series of small pots with compost mixed with about 1/3 grit.

Insert the cutting into the pots, around the edge, spaced about 4-5cms apart. Around the edge, not in the centre, you encourage quicker root formation, as the new roots quickly hit the side of the pot, break, and branch into more lateral rootlets.

Water well, the compost, not the cutting.

We place the pot undercover, on a heated base. This speeds up the rooting process.

With rosemary and lavender cuttings, we put them in a cold frame, a cool, but well-lit spot, and keep the pots well-watered. Cuttings have often rooted in three or four weeks.

Put the pots on a bed of grit (or capillary matting) for the next couple of months and water only when the compost is dry when you poke a finger down an inch below the compost surface.

Check for roots showing in the holes at the bottom and once formed, pot each cutting on individually.

If any of the cuttings show the slightest signs of botrytis, (browning of the cutting, or visible mould), take them out as this will spread quickly.

Store them under cover through the winter, for planting out next spring.

**Rose geranium and lemon cordial recipe**

This is one of the best early autumn drinks – when scented-leaved pelargoniums are at their most prolific so you can pick the leaves almost as often as you like.

I now grow a big block of Pelargoniums ‘Attar of Roses’ and ‘Sweet Mimosa’ especially for cordial and adding into blackberry and apple pies and crumbles. The fragrant leaves add a distinct and delicious flavour. Add citric acid if you want to store this for more than three or four days in the fridge.

### Makes 2 litres

- 2kg caster sugar
- 1 litre water
- handful of rose scented geranium leaves
- juice 6 – 8 lemons (depending on whether tartaric acid is used)
- finely grated zest of 2 lemons
- 30g citric (or tartaric) acid (Optional)

### Method

Heat the sugar, water and geranium leaves until the sugar is dissolved. Cool. Remove the geranium leaves and add the citric acid (if using), juice and zest.

Dilute to taste with sparkling water.