Hort report June 2018

Our mother’s geraniums, that she put in her windowboxes, are not geraniums at all, but Pelargoniums. Even the currently popular ‘Scented Geraniums’ are really Pelargoniums.

There are over 300 species of true Geraniums, also known as ‘cranesbill geraniums’, of which I have two. The large one, a herbaceous perennial, gets about three feet tall and wide, and self-seeds prolifically. What started as one plant, is now a patch 20 feet long, with the odd one popping up across the yard. It has small pink flowers with darker veins, and will rebloom if deadheaded.

The other species, with tiny magenta flowers, is Geranium sanguineum, known as ‘bloody geranium’. This plant, a gift from a friend, has gotten wider and wider, but never self-seeded. It is currently a lovely mound a foot high and about two and a half feet wide. This plant is especially good for a rock garden, or the front of a border. It’s an effective ground cover, and has fragrant leaves.

Both bloom May-June in part shade. Geraniums have medium water requirements, are low-maintenance, and the leaves turn reddish in the fall. They are tolerant of both hot summers and cold winters, and are deer tolerant. The only problem I have found is that Japanese beetles are fond of them. I hand pick the beetles, and drop them into soapy water. Each year there are fewer beetles with this method of control.

These are not native, but Geranium maculatum is native to the Northeast US.