

## **Geranium maculatum (Wild Geranium)**

Botanical Bytes by Bruner

By Gregory Bruner

Foliage Height: 12"-18"  
Foliage Width: 12"-18"  
Flower Height: 18"-24"  
Foliage Color: Green  
Flower Color: Lavender to Pink  
USDA Hardiness: 3-8  
Moisture: Dry - Average  
Light: Part Sun - Shade



Geranium maculatum has crept its way over nearly half of the North American continent, brightening spring woodlands from Louisiana and Georgia north to Manitoba and Quebec in Canada.

The names Wild Geranium, Wood Geranium, or Spotted Geranium all refer to the same pink flowering creeper of the woodland. Geranium is derived from the Greek “geranos”, which translates as crane (as in the bird), while maculatum is Latin for “spotted”. These characteristics ring true because some say that the seed capsules resemble a crane’s beak, while the leaves often have light-colored spots.

Dry to moist woodlands are the favored growing site of the Wild Geranium. These plants often form colonies where sufficient sunlight reaches the woodland floor. The deciduous hardwood forests they prefer often provide a rich, well-drained organic soil, but this is not necessary for the plant to survive and thrive. They will tolerate poor soil conditions as well as a decent amount of sun. However, if a site is dry for long periods, it will cause yellowing of the leaves. Northerners may be able to grow Wild Geraniums in moist, sunny locations, while Southerners should stick to growing them in shadier sites to avoid stress on the plants.

Flowers appear in early to mid spring and are pink to lavender in color. The nectar and pollen attract a wide variety of native bees, as well as small butterflies and skippers. Caterpillars of a few moths do use the foliage for a food source, while the dried seeds are enjoyed by birds and chipmunks. Deer will occasionally browse the foliage. However, even with all of this attention from the local wildlife, generally Geranium maculatum will thrive in a good site.

Geranium maculatum was used medicinally for a wide variety of ailments by American Indians. The large rhizomes were prepared in a number of different ways depending on the problem. For example, an astringent extracted from the roots was used to help stop bleeding, while teas helped with toothaches and intestinal disorders. Because harvesting the roots is hard on the plant, generally I avoid digging them up and just enjoy the flowers.

Wild Geranium is part of a diverse woodland community, often growing among Solomon’s Seal, Bellworts, Trilliums, and Mayapples. This is an easy-to-grow, underused perennial worth a try if you need some spring color that the local wildlife will appreciate as much as you do.