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## GARDEN CHRYSANTHEMUMS

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October is the month of the Chrysanthemum, Chrysanthemum morifolium referred to by most gardeners as "The Mum". Chrysanthemum means "Golden Flower" from the two Greek words Chrysos (Golden) and Anthos (flower), which suggests that the original mums were yellow, orange or combinations of these colors. The mum is closely related to two other popular perennial garden flowers, ShaSta Daisy (Chrysanthemum x superbum) and Painted Daisy or Pyrethrum (Chrysanthemum coccineum.) All are in the Compositae, or Daisy family.

The chrysanthemum, grown in the garden, is the same plant grown in the greenhouse as a florists' cut flower and potted plant. The difference is in the cultivars. The selection of cultivars for the garden is based on growth habit, flowering time and winter hardiness. Greenhouse cultivars are selected for production schedules and market

quality. While greenhouse mums are now manipulated by adjusting the photoperiod (daylength) to flower any season of the year, most garden mums flower normally during the months of August, September, and October.

Because the greenhouse and garden Mum are the same plant a question commonly asked of florists is, can I plant my greenhouse mum out in the garden after it flowers? In Connecticut at least, the answer should be no. The cultivar may overwinter, but most greenhouse mums are selected from a group that will flower early in November. By that time most places in Connecticut will have had a frost or freeze, killing the flower buds.

The timing of the first frost or freeze is of concern to gardeners even with the garden Mum cultivars. At Storrs the average date of the first killing frost or freeze is October 8. It has occurred as early as September 21. Obviously, mum flowers can be protected from light frosts by covering them on those nights, extending the flowering period into Indian Summer. However, it is more prudent to select garden Mum cultivars that start to flower in August and September to avoid the frustration of early frosts. In this way, frosts will occur toward the end of their flowering period rather than at the beginning. Aware of this problem, plant breeders have been developing more cultivars that flower early. Perhaps September instead of October should be called the "month of the Chrysanthemum".

Note that in this article we have referred to the Chrysanthemum, Chrysanthemum morifolium as garden mums instead of hardy mums. The fact is that not all garden mum cultivars are hardy and some are only hardy during certain winters. Somehow when they are called "Hardy Mums" there is an implied guarantee that they will always winter over. When they do not, the result can be customer dissatisfaction. To avoid this perceived problem, merely call them "Garden Mums" to distinguish them from the greenhouse mums. Once again plant breeders have been developing chrysanthemum cultivars that are hardier than others. Producers should thus grow and sell only those cultivars that have proven to be most winter hardy in their area.

Another way to encourage garden mums to winter over is through the use of winter mulches. A light covering with salt marsh hay and/or evergreen branches applied at about the time the ground freezes will help. This usually occurs in late November or early December throughout most of Connecticut. This type of mulch keeps the soil uniformly frozen. It prevents the heaving or thrusting of plants out

of the soil which occurs with alternate freezing and thawing. This is a common cause of winter killing of perennials.

Those mums most especially susceptible to various forms of winter injury or death are those that are purchased in flower and planted out in the fall. Much like the Pansy, Viola x wittrockiana in the spring, Mums can be sold in flower in the fall. The customer is obviously attracted to the flowers and can perhaps make a better visual selection for their garden at this time of the year.

The customer should, however, be advised to plant the Mum out in the garden as soon as possible, rather than keeping it in the house or on the patio. That is, of course, if they want to attempt to overwinter the plant. By planting immediately the roots can get established while the soil is still relatively warm. In the absence of rainfall the plants should be watered thoroughly about once a week. When the ground starts to freeze a winter mulch should be applied to these newly planted plants. Even then there is no guarantee that they will make it.

The best time to plant garden mums is in the spring when danger of frost and freezing weather is about over. Mum cuttings are available to the florist and nurseryman from February to July. Plants can be grown to marketable size during the late winter and spring and made available to the customer along with other perennials and bedding plants at the start of the gardening season. Some seed companies now offer mums from seed. The seed can be sown with other bedding plants in March and be sold from mid to late May.

A rather unique way to sell garden mums is to start appropriate cultivars from cuttings in late winter to flower for Mother's Day. When the danger of frost is over these plants may be planted in the garden, cut back and allowed to grow again during the summer. They will then flower a second time that fall in the garden, satisfying the customer once again.

The mum is a versatile flower for the garden. The Cushion Mums are naturally low and compact and tend to branch freely. The flower forms vary from the button like pompons, the daisy-like singles, the decoratives and the spoons to the large spiders. As in the greenhouse, the latter must be disbudded to achieve the large single flower. The color range includes white, red, violet, orange and of course yellow. As a cut flower, mums are one of the longest lasting flowers in the home.

The Chrysanthemum, Chrysanthemum morifolium is native to the Orient. It was grown in Chinese gardens

before 550 B.C. and is now the national flower of Japan. While it is not a low maintenance perennial, it has always been a favorite in American gardens. Perhaps this is because the Mum signals the end of the gardening season in its own brilliant and colorful way.

Incidentally, does anyone know the national flower of the United States?

#### References

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