

Hardy Chrysanthemum Released Under a New Brand

Neil Anderson, Department of Horticultural Science, University of Minnesota

Chrysanthemums [*Dendranthema x grandiflora*] have been bred at the University of Minnesota since 1924, with the initiation by C.E. Cary of greenhouse chrysanthemums (1924-1929) and continued by L.E. Longley with garden chrysanthemums (1929-1949), R.E. Widmer (1949-1988), P.D. Ascher (1988-1999), and currently N.O. Anderson. The breeding program focused initially on greenhouse chrysanthemums (7 cultivars were released during 1935-1940) and later on garden types (80 released since 1939). The chrysanthemum breeding program is now the oldest public sector chrysanthemum breeding program in the world and the only public sector chrysanthemum breeding program in the U.S. (there used to be several). Its germplasm base and genetic resources, coupled with trend-setting breeding endeavors have resulted in a new series of garden mum products.

Early flowering, blooming prior to a killing frost or freeze, and winter hardiness were the first breeding objectives for garden chrysanthemums.

Subsequently, plant habit and stem strength were improved, leading to the release of a popular series of "cushion" habit garden chrysanthemums, the Minn Series. The most popular cultivar, 'Minngopher', revolutionized the industry. Private breeding companies incorporated the cushion habit into all garden mum cultivars and this plant habit now captures the majority of market share.

In fall 2001, a new garden mum (**My Favorite™ 'Autumn Red'**) was released. 'Autumn Red' is the first in a series of chrysanthemums to be released under the My Favorite™ brand. What's unique about 'Autumn Red'? Maroon and gold are the colors of this new product--a fitting reminder of its heritage. This new product represents trend-setting chrysanthemum breeding and research. These new chrysanthemums are the most winter hardy of any chrysanthemums released to date (>90% survival in unprotected field trials, USDA Z3-4). Most garden mums sold on the market are not hardy. My Favorite™ 'Autumn Red' not only sur-

vives the cold winters of the north, it will survive in warmer climates as well. Then, in the second and successive years, it will grow to a larger size than the first year, becoming a shrub (2.5-3.5 feet tall, often 4-5+ feet in diameter). This bursts into flower in the fall with thousands of flowers (5,000-7,000 per plant), completely covering the plant at full bloom. These can also be considered "season extenders" as the flower are very frost tolerant, meaning the plants may continue to flower until a freeze in Minnesota.

My Favorite™ 'Autumn Red' is bred for the 21st century home gardener with little time to spare in their busy schedule. This plant does not need any pinching or pruning by the home gardener. When planted at a spacing of 1-2' apart, it will form a hemispherical hedge (clipped in appearance) that is green all summer, sporting the U of M colors in the fall. In addition, the flowers are frost-tolerant, meaning this plant will bloom until a freeze (usually occurring

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in late October in the Twin Cities). It also attracts butterflies. If you would like to see second-year plants, they are planted in front of Northrop Auditorium (Minneapolis campus of the U of M), the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum (Chanhassen), and in the display

garden/fields on the St. Paul campus.

The My Favorite™ Company (W. Chicago, IL) is our industry partner in this endeavor, which owns the exclusive license to market these chrysanthemums. For further information on the brand, new products or to become a retailer, consult the website: <http://myfavoritegarden.com/>

Many Minnesota independent and chain store retailers carried the product this past fall. It is anticipated that a Minnesota grower will also be added to grow the My Favorite brand™ items in the near future. Four additional colors will be released to complement the mum series in spring, 2002. These are also products of University of

Minnesota chrysanthemum breeding efforts. The U of M is excited about partnership with industry leaders in the release of these new products and we are committed to continuing our working relationship by conducting quality research and the release of additional new products.



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The Minnesota Commercial Flower Growers Bulletin is compiled and edited by John Erwin, Associate Professor, Greenhouse Crop Physiology and Extension, Department of Horticultural Science, University of Minnesota. Feel free to call with suggestions and/or comments (numbers below).

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Send comments to:

Department of Horticultural Science
1970 Folwell Ave. • St. Paul MN 55108
Phone: 612-624-9703 • Fax: 612-624-4941
Email: erwin001@tc.umn.edu

