

Growing Garden Mums

Garden chrysanthemums are a traditional favorite for fall color. In the border, mums are a beautiful complement to fall-blooming sedums and asters, as well as ornamental grasses.

Many gardeners treat mums as annuals - planting them in pots, either alone or planted with other fall ornamentals such as pansies, grasses, asters or ornamental kale. Your imagination is the only limit!

Here at Countryside, we grow our own mums —
This year, 20,000 of them!

Planting

Plant mums anytime from spring (after the last frost) through fall. If planted in the fall, mums planted at least six weeks before the first killing frost have the greatest chances of survival.

Select a Spot with well-drained soil and at least six hours of sun per day. Mums planted in a shady spot will be weak-stemmed and produce few flowers.

Soil Preparation. Prepare the bed by spading deeply. Add mushroom compost or peat moss to increase the organic content of the soil and improve drainage.

How to Plant. Dig a hole about one and a half times the width of the pot and to the same depth as the pot. Gently remove the plant from the pot and plant it so that the top of the root ball is just barely covered. Mums planted in the fall should be thoroughly watered in with a root stimulator to promote faster root establishment.

Watering

During the first season, water whenever the soil begins to dry out. Established mums require water during dry spells. When watering, water deeply to encourage a deeper root system. Apply water directly to the soil — Overhead watering can promote disease problems. A layer of mulch applied in early summer will help to retain soil moisture.

Feeding

Beginning in early May, fertilize once or twice a month with a 15-30-15 liquid fertilizer such as Miracle Gro. Continue until late July when the flower buds have formed. Do not fertilize after August 1st.

Are These Mums Hardy?

Garden mums are considered to be hardy perennials. However, it is not uncommon for them to suffer winter injury; some do not survive our winters. You can increase your chances of success by providing:

→ *The right spot.* Rich well-drained soil with at least 6 hours of sun.

→ *Timing:* Mums planted at least six weeks before the first killing frost have the greatest chances of survival.

→ *Winter Protection.* See instructions on other side.



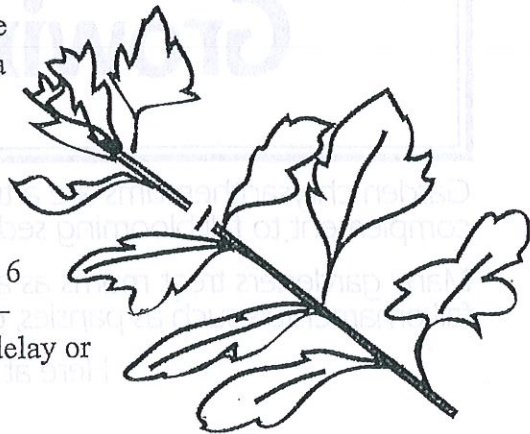
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Pinching

Mums should be pinched (cut back) two or three times during the growing season. Pinching encourages side branching resulting in a bushier, stockier plant. Mums that are not pinched will grow tall and spindly and will produce fewer flowers.

Make the first pinch in the spring when the plant reaches 6 to 8 inches tall. Cut off the top inch of each and every shoot. Lateral branches (side shoots) will develop along the stem. When these branches reach 6 inches, remove their tops. Do not pinch mums any later than July 10 — In our area, flower buds start to form at this time. Late pinching may delay or prevent formation of the flower buds.



Winter Protection

During the autumn, continue to water your mums. It is not necessary to prune back mums in the fall. (Of course, you can remove spent flowers to improve the appearance of the plant.) If you wish to cut the entire plant back, wait until the foliage has been naturally killed back by frost, and then cut back to 2 to 4 inches above the ground.

Severe cold, as well as alternate freezing and thawing can damage, or even kill, mums. To protect them, apply a loose mulch, such as clean straw, shredded leaves, or shredded bark mulch, after several hard frosts. In the spring, remove any old stems and gradually remove the mulch.

Did You Know?

Mums flower in response to shortening days. As days start to get shorter in July, mums respond by forming flower buds. Temperatures can also affect bud formation. Unusually hot weather in midsummer can delay bud formation. Alternatively, unseasonably cool weather can cause early flowering.

A mum by any other name. . . *Fall mums, hardy mums* and *garden mums* are names given to the same plant which, until recently, was known botanically as *Chrysanthemum x morifolium*. To make matters more complicated, the botanic powers that be have reclassified members of the *Chrysanthemum* genus. The Garden Mum is now *Dendranthema x grandiflorum*. The garden mum is related to Shasta Daisies and Painted Daisies.

Florists' mums (the ones that are available in flower shops year round) have been bred for their flowering characteristics. Outdoors, they often do not bloom before killing frosts arrive, and they are not always winter hardy. Nonetheless, they can be planted outdoors and just might bloom in the fall.

Flower Types & Bloom Times

Garden mums are classified according to the shape and arrangement of their petals. The most common types are:

Decorative – petals curving loosely or tightly towards the center. This is the most common type.

Single or Daisy – Daisy-like with an open center

Pompon – Small, stiff, almost globular flowers

"Cushion" describes the shape of the plant (not the flower type) – low growing, bushy and compact.

Bloom Time. Mums are often described as being "early", "mid-season" or "late" bloomers. Actual bloom times vary from year to year, but on the average, in our area early bloomers start in August and continue into September. Late bloomers peak in late September to early October.

How long the flowers on a given plant last depends on the weather. Cool temperatures make the flowers last longer, while a hot spell will decrease their duration. Hard frosts will damage flowers.

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