



## MUM'S THE WORD FOR A ROUSING FALL FINALE

Have your petunias begun to go limp? Are your marigolds drying up? Do your zinnias and phlox show signs of mildew? If the answer is yes to the above questions, maybe it is time to consider switching to chrysanthemums.

The potted mums being featured now at nursery and garden centers are just the thing to put some razzle dazzle in your fall garden. Mums are good-looking, easy to grow, and have a lengthy bloom period. There are hundreds of available varieties and they come in many types. Double types are the most common; they have many rows of petals and no central eye. Singles, anemones, and duplex types all have a central eye, but vary in the number of rows or petals. Colors abound, and run the gamut from harvest golds and bronzes to the more delicate pinks and lavenders.

Chrysanthemums will thrive if planted in a sunny location where they receive at least six hours of full sun a day. Soil should be high in organic matter, well-drained, and fertile. Good sources of organic supplements are peat, leaf mold, well-rotted manure, and compost. Cultivate these into the ground before planting.

If good drainage is a problem, raised beds are probably the simplest solution. The soil level can be raised 8 to 10 inches above the natural grade and kept in place with railroad ties or a similar enclosure. Trying to grow mums in a wet and compacted, poorly drained site is simply wasted effort.

Mums generally prefer a slightly acid soil with a pH around 6.0. A limestone application every three years of 5 pounds per 100 square feet of garden space usually fills this requirement. Adequate fertilization of mums is also important, for they are heavy feeders. At planting time, apply a complete fertilizer and work into the soil to a depth of 6 to 8 inches. Most soil requires 3 to 4 pounds of 5-10-10, 5-10-5 or some similar fertilizer for each 100 square feet. This is often equivalent to a small handful per plant.

To encourage deep rooting of your mums, soak the ground thoroughly each time you water with a wand hose attachment, soil soaker, or automatic sprinkler. Deep watering at infrequent intervals of ten days or so is more beneficial than daily surface sprinklings. Mulching with pine needles, shredded bark, or wood chips will also help keep the soil moist.

Chrysanthemums in general are not regularly hardy, and greenhouse varieties rarely

survive the first winter if planted out-of-doors. Many varieties are capable of withstanding low temperatures, but not fluctuating temperatures with alternate freezing and thawing. Mulching can help to reduce the fluctuation in winter soil temperatures, but it is best not to use heavy, light-restricting materials such as leaves. Instead, use spruce or hemlock boughs and add a light covering of straw after the ground freezes.

Gardeners who have already established mums in the landscape must remember to pinch plants to achieve the compact, well-branched appearance of potted nursery mums. Pinching, which is the removal of ½ to 1 inch of stem tips, should start in the spring when new growth is about 5 inches high. Subsequent pinching should be done each time there is new lateral growth of 5 to 6 inches. Mums usually require two to three pinches, the last before mid-July. In order to stay healthy and vigorous, your mums will also need to be dug, divided, and reset every year or two.

Now that you know how, put a little razzle dazzle in your fall and plant some garden mums. Whether you replace the annuals in your foundation planting or simply have a container or two, it's a great way to brighten up the landscape. And those mums will keep on blooming long after the frost has turned your tomato plants black!