



Chrysanthemums

Our autumn had beautiful weather-so invigorating that it was easy to spend all day lost in garden chores. Late blooming flowers filled the garden. Amongst the most beautiful were the chrysanthemums.

Mums were first grown in China at least 3500 years ago. Chrysanthemums were used as an herbal medicine, for salads, and for tea. Pottery from ancient China is decorated with flowers similar to our modern day varieties. By the eighth century c.e., chrysanthemums had travelled to Japan. There, the flower became the Emperor's personal symbol. The flowers are still cherished in Japan, and some of today's most spectacular hybrids are originating there. By the 17th century, chrysanthemums appeared in the west. The Swedish botanist Linnaeus named the plant chrysanthemum, combining the Greek words *chrysos* ("gold") and *antheon* ("flower").

To date, hybridizers have developed over 5,000 named varieties of chrysanthemums with colors of reds, pinks, purples, yellows, orange, and white, bicolor, and a multitude of distinct forms. Not all of these varieties will do well here in Minnesota – some are so tender that they will not survive even a mildly cold winter. Some bloom so late that we won't enjoy their flowers before real cold sets in. Florists have learned to manipulate daylight hours when growing mums and will force their flowering. Therefore, greenhouse mums in full bloom are available year round. Not all the chrysanthemums available in our local box stores or in florist's stores will reliably overwinter here. Thankfully, the University of Minnesota has developed over 60 varieties of winter hardy mums. The Canadians have also developed winter-hardy mums.

For a beautiful display next fall, study available chrysanthemum varieties this winter to plant next spring. I have seen Minnesota mums at the Saint Paul farmers' market and in garden catalogs such as Faribault Growers, Burpee, Busse Gardens, and Spring Hill Nurseries. Chrysanthemums can be planted in the perennial garden, or treated as annuals if the variety is not hardy. Chrysanthemums combine well with ornamental grasses which are showing their decorative seed heads in autumn. Mix mums with tall sedums, asters, shrub roses, or fall-blooming natives.

Plant mums in early spring after all danger of frost has passed, so that their roots have ample opportunity to grow well and establish a vigorous plant before autumn bloom. Use well rooted cuttings from local nursery centers, or divide your own plants and use rooted suckers from your own plants. Mums should be divided every year and replanted, for the best growth. Trade excess divisions with your friends and neighbors, or better yet, pot them up and donate them to a local plant sale. Choose a spot in full sun that is moist, but has good drainage. Mixing compost into the planting hole will help to maintain a moist condition and will provide nutrients for the growing plants. Following package directions incorporate a small amount of organic or inorganic fertilizer (5-10-5, or 10-10-10, for example) into the planting hole. Minnesota Mums should be planted 1 ½ to 2 feet apart; space the much larger Mammoth Mums 3 to 4 feet apart. Mulch with straw, leaves, or wood chips to keep the soil moist and to discourage weed growth. In August, fertilize again with a side dressing of additional fertilizer. If you are using a slow release fertilizer, the second fertilization may be skipped. Water well during the growing season, insuring at least an inch weekly.

Pinching out the terminal growth on the branches will result in a bushier plant. Pinch when the plants grow to 6", and pinch again when the new shoots grow another 6". Stop pinching after the Fourth of July, or flowering will be reduced. The University of Minnesota mammoth mums should not be pinched as they are self branching.

After blooms fade and before real cold weather sets in, trim the stems to 4 inches. To insure that even your winter hardy varieties do indeed survive the winter, cover with 6 inches of straw, chopped leaf, or pine needle mulch. Remove it as the ground warms in the spring.

To find more information, check "Garden Chrysanthemums" (<http://www.extension.umn.edu>) or the National Chrysanthemum Society, (<http://www.mums.org/>).

Happy Gardening,

Joe Baltrukonis