



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

October Flower of the Month: Chrysanthemums (October 12, 2024)

By Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardeners

Chrysanthemums, a favorite in our gardens, are herbaceous perennials in the Asteraceae (daisy) family that add a pop of color to a fall garden. These perennials form erect mounds that reach 1 to 3 feet tall and 1 to 2 feet wide. Chrysanthemum flowers symbolize "cheerfulness, optimism, and abundance." They are often tied to the arrival of autumn since they are one of the most popular fall flowers.



Chrysanthemums have a very long history and a wide geographical range. Mums were first cultivated in China as an herb and described in Chinese writings in the 15th century B.C. In the 8th century, they appeared in Japan and became so popular that a single-flowered mum was adopted as the crest of the emperor. The mum was first introduced in the Western world in the 17th century and named Chrysanthemum, a combination of Greek words meaning "golden flower." Colonists introduced the mum to America, where it became a fast favorite. There are over 160 species of mums, mostly native to China, Japan, and Europe.

Chrysanthemum x morifolium is the Queen of the Fall Flowers, celebrating the season in jewel colors: yellow, lavender, pink, purple, red, bronze, orange, and white. Each bloom consists of tiny flowers called florets. Bloom forms range in size from pincushion petite to giant spiders, and there are hundreds from which to choose.

Florist's chrysanthemums (*C. x grandiflorum*) are the familiar autumn blooming mums we see everywhere, from our gardens to florists' displays to grocery stores. Also known as garden mums, these versatile flowers come in varied plant sizes from less than a foot to 6 feet tall, flower forms and sizes, and colors.

Flower forms include anemone - a large raised center and one or two rows of petals; decorative - broad overlapping rays that form a large full flower; pompom - a globular form; and spider or quill - long tubular rays. Fluted petals, curved rays, irregular petal length, and flattened tips combine to produce other flower forms. Colors include red, pink, white, yellow, bronze, orange, purple, and multi-colors.

Garden mums are easy to grow. They like relatively fertile soil—digging in compost before planting gives them a good start. Water them regularly but not to the point of soggy soil. Mulching around the plants helps to keep steady moisture in the soil. Mums like full sun, but in our area, they appreciate a little afternoon shade. Since the bloom is keyed to longer nights (11 hours or more), it is important not to plant mums under street lights or night lights—they might get confused and think it is still summer!

Chrysanthemums tend to grow with few side shoots, so pinching back new shoots when they are several inches long helps to produce bushier plants. However, cutting back should be stopped by early to mid-summer in order to allow buds to develop for fall bloom. Gardeners who wish to produce large exhibition flowers disbud all but a few buds on each plant. After flowering has finished, the stems should be cut back to about 8 inches.

Mums can be planted in early spring or, in our area, in the fall. Some types can be grown from seed, but most come from nursery plants or, for a larger variety, from the mail-order catalog. Since chrysanthemum plants should be divided every few years, new starts can be obtained from division and also from rooted stem cuttings.

And if you have a potted mum, enjoy it inside until the bloom is finished, then cut back to about 8 inches and plant it outside for next year's pleasure.

Chrysanthemums make wonderful garden borders; their long-lasting blooms make great cut flowers for the gardener and the florist, and they give us brilliant blooms in the fall. So try some mums for your flower garden.

The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:

Visalia Farmer's Market, 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8 - 11 am, Tulare Co. Courthouse

Oct. 12, 11 am – 1 pm: Halloween Event at Tulare Public Library, 475 N. M St., Tulare

Oct. 12, 10 am – 2 pm: Luis Nursery Plant Clinic, 139 S. Mariposa Ave., Visalia

Oct. 19, 10 am – 1 pm: Hofman's Nursery, 12491 W Lacey Blvd., Hanford

Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30–11:30 am

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