



## Mums the Word

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

New England falls are renowned for their colors. The fiery shades of the autumn leaves, luscious orange pumpkins, aromatic red apples, vibrant pink and purple asters, and the amazing rainbow of hues worn by an ever-expanding list of chrysanthemum cultivars. Mums can be found just about anywhere this time of year from your local garden center, grocery, or big box store to exceptionally attractive plantings at local hospitality venues as well as a great number of residential locations. Mums are definitely a fabulous fall staple here.

Ancestors of our well-loved decorative mums were grown more than 2500 years ago in Chinese gardens. The name, chrysanthemum, comes from the Greek meaning 'gold flower'. Originating in China, Zen Buddhist monks brought it to Japan about 400 AD, and in 910 it was named the national flower of Japan. Mums were brought to Europe in the late 1600s. Linnaeus, the Swedish botanist, believed them similar to the corn marigold and classified them as *Chrysanthemum indicum*. Most recently, taxonomists have reclassified them as *Dendranthema x grandiflora*, although most of us will still refer to these plants as chrysanthemums.

Most of us will still call them mums and add them to our perennial beds or just purchase attractive plants to add to garden beds, to infuse a dash of color as decorative pot plants or to incorporate into our fall containers, window boxes or other décor.



Fall mums with rudbeckia and asters. Photo by dmp2022

When selecting mums to purchase, consider color as well as your desire to plant them in the ground either immediately or later this fall. If you are decorating with pumpkins, cornstalks, hay

bales and other items in the 'warm' color range, an attractive accompaniment might be mums in shades of gold, orange and bronze.

Those with cooler colored, grey, blue or the like homes, might want to jazz up their fall color scheme with pinks, purples and reds and perhaps toss in some fall cabbages or kales for a 'cool' color scheme. If mums will be planted in garden beds with the hopes of them surviving the winter and being a permanent fixture, select plants with lots of basal sprouts. These indicate the plant is still in active growth and given adequate time, it may be able to establish a good root system before the soil freezes.

Plants held in pots late into the fall rarely will make it through the winter but then you have another excuse to purchase more mums next year. Be sure to keep potted or containerized plants well-watered. Usually, the root system is fairly large and warm autumn days cause plants to take up large amounts of water. Another suggestion is to repot the newly acquired mums into slightly larger pots so there will be more potting mix that stays moister longer.

When planting fall mums in the ground, loosen the root system if it is tightly wound and set in a well-drained, rich soil in a sunny spot. Give the plant a haircut after the blooms have faded but don't remove the foliage. It will offer some protection to the root system below. As the temperatures plummet, plants can be mulched with 2 to 3 inches of straw or shredded bark. The mulch should be pulled back as soon as new growth is spotted in late March or early April.

If perennial mums are what you are looking for, your best bet is to purchase them in the spring. They will have all growing season to get established. Typically, they are pinched 2 to 3 times during the summer until about mid-July. The pinching removes 3 to 5 inches of tip growth causing plants to form more stems and hence, more flowers.

Hardy garden mums are easy to care for. Look for interesting flower forms and colors. Give them sun, plenty of water and a fertile soil and they will be happy. Usually, they need to be divided every 3 years or so and that should be done in the spring.

Whether in containers or in the ground, fall is definitely the time to enjoy the long-lived and colorful blossoms of chrysanthemums. For questions about mums or if you have any other gardening questions, contact the UConn Home & Garden Education at (877) 486-6271 or [www.homegarden.cahnrc.uconn.edu](http://www.homegarden.cahnrc.uconn.edu) or your local Cooperative Extension Center.