



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Autumn is Chrysanthemums Season (October 9, 2021)

by Michelle Le Strange, UCCE Master Gardener Advisor Emeritus



Chrysanthemums are the last bright splash of color to the autumn and winter garden. Because these plants are so indispensable for fall landscapes, chrysanthemum breeders have created astonishing colors, shapes, heights and forms. Most plants are 1 to 2 feet tall, with a few taller exceptions.

The absolute easiest, most trouble-free are "garden" mums. As the name suggests these mums thrive in the garden as opposed to a greenhouse and come back year after year. Plant your garden mums outdoors in spring, and without any special care, they will bloom later that same year. Blooms can be as big as 4-inches across.

Some garden mums are "cushion" mums. These are low growing, bushy and free flowering. Some produce so many flowers you can't see any green foliage!

MUM FLOWER SHAPES and COLORS

The most common flower shape is a thick disc covered with petals and is known as a "decorative" in chrysanthemum circles. But the flowers of other types can look like "daisies" – single rows of petals around yellow centers, "anemones" – frilly petals around lacy, raised centers, "pompoms" – multiple petals arranged to form a globular sphere, and even "spiders" – flat and shaggy petals of various lengths resembling daddy longlegs. These are only some of the common shapes.

The chrysanthemum color palette includes every color but blue, and the holding time for blossoms even in a vase, is measured in weeks rather than days. My advice is to pick colors and flower forms you like and get growing!

GETTING STARTED

There are three ways to start your chrysanthemum garden. 1) Buy very young plants, and plant in the spring, 2) start plants from cuttings or 3) buy potted plants at local garden centers and plant in the fall.

If you buy young plants in the spring, they will only be a few inches tall when you get them, but by fall they'll be fat little bushes covered with blooms.

To take tip cuttings, wait until daytime temperatures in spring have climbed into the 70s, and then cut the top 3 to 4 inches off a number of soft shoots from a mature plant that is 6 to 8 inches tall. Pull off the lower leaves and stick them in a rooting medium. Keep the medium moist but not soggy and place outdoors in a sheltered spot away from direct sunlight. In about 2 weeks the shoots should have rooted and then you can transplant your new mums directly into the ground.

The quickest way to have a display of chrysanthemum color is to buy pots of blooming mums and plant them in your landscape in late summer or early fall. Be sure to plant 4 to 6 weeks before first frost, so that roots have time to get established. Give plants lots of water to keep them from wilting, but don't fertilize until the following year.

CHRYSANTHEMUM CARE

All chrysanthemums have the same requirements for good growth. First, they need a spot with at least 5 hours of sunlight a day to bloom. The ideal soil for mums is organically rich, deep and slightly acidic. For us that means digging in some compost and aged manure before planting. Nourish the young plants regularly through spring and summer but stop all feeding when the buds start to show color and you'll see the best flowers. Mulching also helps mum roots stay cooler during our hot summers.



A soil that drains well is critical for long term chrysanthemum plant survival. More mums are lost to wet feet in winter and early spring than to anything else. Mums really do better if you can grow them in a raised bed where the water drains away quickly.

A plant can grow undisturbed for 2-3 years and then it is time to divide the plant. Do this in spring just as the new growth starts to sprout out. A 24-inch plant can be cut into three pieces and planted immediately to form three new plants. It's really quite easy.

Since most new garden mums are more compact and grow bushy naturally, there is not as much pinching as was formerly required of taller, lankier, older varieties. But the best perennial mums for your garden may not be compact cushions with decorative flowers. Upright kinds, which grow more than 18 inches tall look gawky in pots but are magnificent when grown in the garden!

The Tulare-Kings County Master Gardeners will be available to answer your questions:

Ace Hardware, Visalia - 1st Sat./every month, 10 am-1 pm

Luis Nursery, Visalia - 2nd Sat./every month, 10 am-2 pm

Visalia Farmer's Market - 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8-11 am, 2100 W. Caldwell Ave (behind Sears Building)

Questions? Call us:

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

Visit our website to search past articles, find links to UC gardening information, or to email us with your questions:

http://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/

Visit us on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/mgtularekings14/>

Instagram at: @mgtularekings