

Chrysanthemums

“If you would be happy for a lifetime, grow Chrysanthemums.” (a Chinese philosopher)



Chrysanthemum morifolium

Summer’s exuberant show is beginning to fade away. The nights are getting cooler and the mornings are slow to warm. Fall is definitely on the way. Now is the time to enjoy garden mums. Those mounds of green that spent the summer quietly in the garden background are getting ready to burst forth into glorious color.

The chrysanthemum is first mentioned in Chinese writings in the 15th century B.C. The Chinese thought the chrysanthemum had the power of life and used the boiled roots as a headache remedy; brewed the leaves for a drink; and ate the petals and young sprouts in salads. They decorated their pottery with the likeness of chrysanthemums. Chrysanthemums were one of four “noble plants” and thus were not allowed in a lower-class person’s garden. A Chinese belief states that if you wipe your mouth with a chrysanthemum after drinking wine and give it to your

beloved, undying love and fidelity is ensured.

In the 8th Century A.D., according to Chinese legend, 12 Chinese maidens and 12 Chinese youth carrying chrysanthemums swam to an uninhabited island, now known as Japan. The Japanese revere the chrysanthemum and it has become an object of devotion. The Imperial crest, seal and throne are chrysanthemums. To the Japanese, the orderly unfolding of the mum’s petals symbolize perfection and the flower itself the sun. They celebrate a National Chrysanthemum Day, the Festival of Happiness. A Japanese belief states that a single petal placed in the bottom of a wine glass will encourage a long and healthy life.

In the 17th century A.D., the Dutch introduced the chrysanthemum to the Western world. Early drawings show them as small yellow daisy-like flowers. Hybridization has resulted in chrysanthemums of all colors, (except blue), shapes and sizes. The mum has become the largest commercially produced flower in the United States. It is easy to cultivate, blooms on schedule, has a wide range of form and colors, and the blooms last a long time. While we bring Chrysanthemums into our homes, wear them as corsages, plant them in our gardens and use them in arrangements for all occasions, in Italy they are thought of as the death flower and are acceptable only for the decoration of graves.

Exhibition Chrysanthemums

These flowers are generally grown by hobbyists for the purpose of entering them in exhibitions. They are categorized according to their flower form, season of bloom, and whether they are disbudded or non-disbudded.

Flower Forms

- **Anemone** – A large raised center is surrounded by one or more rows of petals. The center may be the same color as the petals or contrasting.
- **Brush** – The petals are narrow and rolled, giving a soft dahlia look to the flower.
- **Decorative** – The petals are long and broad, giving it a shingled look.
- **Incurve** – Petals that curve upward and inward form a big double flower.
- **Irregular Incurve** – The petals are looser and softly curving.
- **Pompon** – Round, neat, small, compact flowers are formed with flat, fluted or quilled petals.
- **Quill** – The petals are long, narrow and rolled. The flower is similar to the spider but less droopy.
- **Reflex** – A big double flower, with rays that curl in, out and sideways giving the flower a shaggy look.
- **Semidouble** – Similar to the single or daisy but with two, three or four rows of petals around a yellow center.
- **Single or Daisy form** – A single row of petals around a yellow center. It may be large or small, with broad or narrow petals.
- **Spider** – The petals are long, curling and tubular ending in a fish-hook curved tip.
- **Spoon** – The tubular petals are flattened at the tip making little disks, sometimes with a contrasting color.

Disbudded

If the Chrysanthemum belongs to the disbudded classification then it is further classified into size groups. Disbudded Chrysanthemums have all the flower buds on a shoot removed except for the terminal bud. An exceptionally large flower results. A hobbyist will allow two flowers on a plant that will be exhibited, four or five flowers if it is in the garden.

Non-disbudded

Non-disbudded Chrysanthemums are categorized by size and habit:

- **Spray** – the stems contain a variety of flower forms: single, reflexed, intermediate, anemone-centered, pompon, spoon or quill shaped. These are typically grown for garden decoration and cutting.
- **Charm** – a rounded dwarf bush bearing hundreds of single flowers. They are grown for decoration, exhibition and bonsai.
- **Cascade** – similar to charm but can be trained as fans, pillars, pyramids or cascades.
- **Pompon** – used in borders. The flowers are round on dwarf and bushy plants.
- **Rubellum Group** – this group is clump-forming and bushy. The stems are woody. Flowers are single, semi-double or double with yellow centers.

The [National Chrysanthemum Society](#) maintains a website where you can get more information on these varieties of Chrysanthemums.

Garden Mums

Not to be confused with the above elite flowers, it's not too late to visit your local nursery for plain old ordinary garden mums. The plant you pick should have dark green firm leaves and no damage to the flowers or stems. They should be rounded, mounded and have a cushion-like growth habit. Upright narrow plants have been grown too close together and are not as healthy.

Plant your mums in a sunny, well-drained location with good air circulation and some organic material mixed into the soil. Blooming plants meant for indoor enjoyment can be planted in your garden, but are probably not winter hardy. Nursery mums have been bred to be neat and compact. They will be a mass of buds and blooms. The plant did not naturally grow this way. It has been groomed through the season. Most outdoor mums will withstand cold weather, but can be killed by a hard frost. If you are going to over winter them, mulch well and leave the foliage on to give additional protection until new growth starts in the spring. Chrysanthemums will benefit from being divided every other year in early spring when new growth begins. Guard the new growth well against slugs.

To duplicate last year's plant, in mid-June, when the plants are about six inches tall, pinch the new growth back to a leaf about one inch down the stem. This will promote branching. As the plants continue to grow, each time another six inches of new growth is reached, again pinch back to a leaf about one inch down the stem. Do not pinch the plant back after mid-July or you will impact flower development. Fertilize monthly during the growing season with a general-purpose fertilizer. Keep your plant wet enough to prevent wilting but don't over-water.

References

Brenzel, Kathleen Norris. *Sunset Western Garden Book*. Menlo Park: Sunset Publishing Corporation, 2001.

Bridkell, Christopher, Judith D. Zuk. *The American Horticultural Society A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants*. New York, DK publishing, Inc., 1997.

[National Chrysanthemum Society](#)