

"Mums" the Word
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Have you ever noticed how some landscapes come alive with color in September and October? Most likely these landscapes have garden mums blooming. Brilliant displays of yellow, orange, red, purple, and white jump out at the corners of houses and in flowerbeds. These colors are especially brilliant when the background has become dull in color after the first frost. Garden mums are the source of this wonderful color. They are another short day plant and start to bloom about six to eight weeks after the day length becomes shorter than fourteen hours.

Chrysanthemums, a member of the *asteraceae* family, have been cultivated in China for more than 1400 years. Hybrids have been grown for over 1200 years in Korea and Japan and in Europe since the 18th century. Eight classes of cultivated chrysanthemums are grown in the floriculture industry: daisy, anemone, quilled, spoon, decorative, spider, incurved, reflex, and pompons. The differences in these classes have to do with the shape of the disk florets and ray florets in the flower "head". Think about a sunflower, another member of the aster family, and how the seeds are produced in the center of the flower head and the petals are on the outer edge. Each seed is produced from a single flower called a disk floret and each "petal" is also a single flower called a ray floret, although these flowers are sterile.

Great care is taken in the production of chrysanthemums in the greenhouse industry. To encourage multiple branching the shoot-tips are removed by pinching two weeks after planting. Once the lateral shoots are in inch and a half long the short day treatment begins. In our area that naturally takes place around September 20th. Blooming plants during the spring and summer must have greenhouse lighting controlled by covering (removing light) or additional lighting. Flower buds are removed when they reach button size depending on whether the plant is to be a spray or disbudded type. The center bud is removed for spray type to encourage uniform blooming of the lateral buds. To produce a disbudded plant all lateral buds are removed so the remaining center buds can develop into large flowers.

Mums are able to withstand light frost and look even better after those frosts. When the annuals have withered away mums can be an excellent replacement. It's not too late to plant some as many garden centers still have some available. Plant them in full sun, they prefer a full day of sun but if your yard is shady choose a place with at least a half a day of sun. Be sure to keep watered, never allow them to become wilted. If you wish you can place containers of mums around and plant them in the ground before the soil freezes.

Next year when they start to grow be sure to pinch off one or two inches of new growth, this will cause the plant to grow bushy. The bushier the plant the better the display will be next fall. Pinch them again when they grow to a height of four to six inches and one more time after they have grown another inch or two. Stop pinching in mid July so that they can get good flower buds. Careful planning and care of garden mums will give you many years of awesome fall blooming plants.

If you have questions about mums in the garden give me a call at 605-394-2188 or e-mail me at ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu.