

The Ubiquitous Mum
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Chrysanthemums, the honorees of Japan's "Festival of Happiness" and the undisputed queen of fall flowers have arrived. Named from the Greek prefix 'chrys-' meaning 'golden' and suffix '-anthemon' meaning 'flower' by Carl Linnaeus (Father of Taxonomy), a Swede, the Chrysanthemum is native to China. And as one Chinese philosopher noted: "If you would be happy for a lifetime, grow Chrysanthemums."

An herbaceous perennial, Chrysanthemums grow 2-3 ft high. They are '**photoperiodic**,' meaning they bloom in response to the shortened days and longer nights of the fall in the Northern Hemisphere. Mums prefer full sun and well-drained soil. Avoid planting them near a street light or other night light as the light will confuse the mum's photoperiodic response.

Although many gardeners grow Chrysanthemums as annuals, they are best planted in the spring. Fall planting of hardy mums is fine, but they must be planted six weeks before a killing frost. After the first killing frost, cut the foliage back to about 4 inches. Overwintering protection such as adding layers of straw is highly advisable. In the spring, begin pinching new growth when the plant is 4-6 inches high. Pinching the new growth encourages a bushier, less leggy plant. Continue pinching every 2-3 weeks until the beginning of summer. Pinching any later will delay flowering. Fertilize Chrysanthemums only until buds form in July. After July (other than watering) it is a waiting game and fall is just around the corner!

There is much more to the Chrysanthemum than meets the eye. We see them everywhere this time of year. Whether they are stocked on the tables in our nurseries, flavoring tea in China, or as a subject in NASA's Clean Air Study demonstrates, reducing indoor air pollution in our homes, the poet, Hattie L. Knapp sums it up best in her poem *Chrysanthemum*: ". . . As we watch the summer days depart/ And the painted leaves in silence fall,/ And the vines are dead upon the wall; / A dreamy sadness fills each heart,/ Our garden seems a dreary place, /No brilliant flowers its borders grace, / Save in a sheltered nook apart,/ Where gay beneath the autumn sun/ Blooms our own Chrysanthemum."