

## A GUIDE FOR GROWING CHRYSANTHEMUMS FOR THE WASHINGTON, D.C. AREA

### **MAY 15 -30:**

When you bring your new mums home, they can be kept in the plastic cups for up to 10 days. Water them daily, preferably in the morning, and keep them in moderate to full sun. If the leaves look limp in the late afternoon, move the plants to a spot with more shade to reduce the demand for water - the immature root system cannot meet the demands for water at this point so providing more water will not help.

While plants can go directly into the garden or a large pot from the cups, most experienced growers move the plant to a 6-inch pot with a very light potting mix consisting mostly or entirely of sphagnum moss. When you transfer plants give them a cup of liquid starter fertilizer with low nitrogen and high phosphate numbers (for example, 9-45-15). This stimulates further root growth and keeps the leafy growth from outrunning the root system. In about 10 days, the roots should fill the 6-inch pot and the plant is ready to transfer to the soil or the large 10- or 12-inch pot.

While the plants are in the cups or small pots, prepare the growing area. Turn the soil and work in a 1-2" layer of compost, leaf mold, or other humus to increase the organic content and open up the clay soils typical of Northern Virginia. Consider getting a soil test. Forms and sample boxes are available at public libraries. The tests are done at a state lab and provide valuable information on the pH and nutrient status of your soil. If your soil is acidic, follow the instructions for adding horticultural lime to sweeten the soil.

Small bloomed garden chrysanthemums should be set 15 to 18 inches apart. The large flowering disbud types should be about 8 to 12 inches apart. The roots should have filled the 6-inch pot at this point. Simply dig a hole large enough to accommodate the root ball and cover. Mums are shallow rooted plants and should not be planted any deeper. When you transfer the plants give them a cup of liquid starter fertilizer with low nitrogen and high phosphate numbers (for example, 9-45-15). Never use lawn fertilizers in the garden bed, because they may contain traces of herbicides

Plants should be mulched when first set out in the soil to conserve moisture, suppress weeds, keep the soil cool

and open. Mulching also helps reduce soil-borne disease. A 1- to 2-inch layer of pine needles or bark, or your favorite mulch should be used. Shredded hardwood mulch available from the city or county should not be used. The shredded hardwood competes with the mums for nitrogen and other nutrients from the soil. Watch for slugs early in the season. Generally the pesticides used on other flower crops can be used on mums. **Always check the pesticide labels at your local garden supply store and follow all the safety and application instructions.**

### **JUNE 1 – 15:**

After going into the garden or large pots, mums benefit from regular applications of fertilizer. One-cup weekly of a balanced liquid fertilizer (for example, 20-20-20) is good. If you miss a week, just give the plant two cups the next week to catch up. Time release fertilizers can also be used. Keep this fertilizer schedule up until you see color in the developing flower buds in late August/early September.

When garden mums are 6-inches tall (typically about June 15<sup>th</sup>), cut off about an inch from the growing tips. This is the first of two pinches and stimulates branching. Come autumn the flowers will develop at the ends of the branches, so the more branches the more flowers you will have.

Remove lateral branches from the large flowering types of chrysanthemums to train them into a single vertical stem that will put all of its energy into a small number of very large blooms. If you let the exhibition mums grow bushy, you will get many smaller flowers rather than a few very large blooms.

### **JULY 1 – 15:**

About two weeks after the first pinch, new lateral branches will have grown out. Perform the second and final pinch. Flower buds start to develop in late-July on the early garden mums so no pinching after July 15th.

The blooms will be heavy and the plants need support particularly the exhibition mums. Tie the stems to stakes using twist-ties, clips or wire. Three-foot stakes for garden mums. Five-foot stakes for large blooms.

All Chrysanthemum growers are invited to attend the monthly meetings of the Old Dominion Chrysanthemum Society at 2:30 to 4:00 PM on the second Sunday of each month in the Falls Church Community Center, 223 Little Falls Street, Falls Church, Virginia

Learn about the benefits of membership at [www.odcsmums.org](http://www.odcsmums.org), our Facebook page **Old-Dominion-Chrysanthemum-Society-Inc** and at National Chrysanthemum Society at [www.mums.org](http://www.mums.org) and on Facebook **National Chrysanthemum Society, Inc. USA**.

### **JULY 15 – AUGUST 15:**

This is a period of rapid growth for the plants. Keep up the weekly fertilizer applications.

As the plants grow, keep tying to the stakes to keep the stems straight. Three tyings (as growth progresses) are usually sufficient for the season. Water only when the plants begin to wilt and then water deeply. Shallow watering keeps the roots near the surface and they cannot tap all the nutrients available deeper in the soil. The plants also dry out more quickly.

Nights are getting longer now signaling the mums that it is time to bloom. Buds should appear on garden mums and start to show color in late August. If you want the large bloom types to flower in early October rather than late October/early November, the plants need total darkness 13 hours a day until flower buds form (about two weeks). Begin in late July or early August. Put them in a shed or garage with the windows covered. Alternatively cover the plants with a black plastic bag with no holes between 6PM and 7AM each day.

### **AUGUST 15 – SEPTEMBER 15:**

At this time of the season, bugs are vigorous and plentiful. Follow a regular insect control schedule.

Shift to a low nitrogen fertilizer (for example, 10-30-20). This encourages the plant to redirect its energy into the flower buds and away from leafy growth. Also, continue pruning, removing all unwanted growth like lateral branches on the large bloomed types to shape the plant. Do it weekly.

### **SEPTEMBER 15 – 30:**

Enjoy your garden mum blooms. Invite your family and friends over for the fall colors.

Continue disbudding, as needed, and feeding and your insect control schedule. Move your large bloomed types under the eaves or an awning to protect them from the rain. A large bloom can hold almost a pound of water after it rains. This will break the stem.

### **OCTOBER 1 – OCTOBER 31:**

Local mum societies hold their shows the third and fourth weekends in October. Check [odcsmums.org](http://odcsmums.org) for details each year. Enter a few of your blooms in the

shows so others may enjoy them. You can compare notes with other mum enthusiasts. Visit the mum shows at the gardens in your area. Brookside Gardens usually has a very nice display.

### **NOVEMBER 1 – 30:**

With some protection, such as that furnished by moving the pots against a south facing wall or making a plastic shelter, you can usually extend your season for enjoying chrysanthemums past Thanksgiving even when there are regular nighttime frosts or light snow. It is worth the effort.

Garden mums sometimes winter over safely provided they are in a well-drained location and covered with a light airy mulch, like pine boughs or straw. Cut them back about 6 inches above the ground. Any plants infested by insects or diseased should be dug up and discarded with other yard waste in the trash collection. **Do not add them to your compost pile where insect eggs and fungal spores can overwinter and be returned to the soil in the spring.** Exhibition mums can be carried over some years, if the pots are put in mulch in a shaded area.

### **NEXT SPRING:**

To carry plants over from the previous year to produce rooted cuttings or divide the surviving clumps, small applications of fertilizer should be applied to each plant during March and April to encourage vigorous shoot development. Dig up and discard any surviving plants that show signs of any insect, slug, or disease problems. Clumps should be divided each year. Dig and remove dirt from the old clump. Select the more vigorous shoots from the outside of the clump for transplanting. Cut each shoot from clump with 1 or 2 inches of root and plant in their permanent place.

Most chrysanthemum club members prefer rooted cuttings. They are disease-free, grow more vigorously, and can be planted to bloom at a specified time more consistently. Mums root easily in 10 days to 4 weeks, depending on how closely the temperature is kept to 65 degrees F, anytime from April to mid-July. Most people in the Washington, D.C. area start them in late April to early June. The later dates will generally produce shorter plants.

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