



ASK A MASTER GARDENER

CHRYSANTHEMUMS

By Trish Grenfell, Placer County Master Gardener

Q I love spring and summer because my landscaping has so many bright colors. It's almost November and the summer flowers are fading fast. Any suggestions for a fall garden of many colors?

A If you love the many shapes and colors of summer's dahlias, daisies, zinnias, asters, coreopsis, calendulas, you are in luck. Your fall garden can achieve the same variety with the many facades of just one plant—the chrysanthemum. Hundreds of hardy cultivars make the mums the divas of the autumn garden. The blooms last for weeks, not days, and the sheer number of flowers per plant should convince you that they are showstoppers. To get the maximum effect from a distance, stick to one or two colors in one area. If you decorate with pumpkins & gourds, choose orange, bronze, yellow, and creamy white mums. If your landscape is now mainly green foliage plants, try bright pinks, lavenders, pure whites, or reds. With such bold colors, a large grouping of mums can excite even the most drab of fall landscapes. Note: mums also make great container plants.

Chrysanthemums grow best and produce the most flowers if planted in full sun. They respond to plenty of food and moisture, but do not like wet feet. Space them 18-30 inches apart for best results. After blooming, you can cut them back to about 8 inches. If the mums are hit by a hard frost and appear dead, cut them back to the ground and provide light mulch.

In the spring pinch back shoots when they are about 4 to 5 inches long to promote more blooms and keep the plants low and bushy. Pinch again when they are a foot tall. Discontinue pinching about mid-July. When the goal is to have large flowers, it is best to remove all buds except for the one on top. Chrysanthemums should be divided every three to five years to avoid overcrowding and promote maximum flowering.

Mums are one of the easiest perennials to grow and new cultivars are plentiful. Some even rebloom in the spring and summer. Check your garden centers now!

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