



Trowel Talk!

October, 2010

Mums the Word!

Chinese proverb: *If you would be happy for a lifetime, grow chrysanthemums.*

Archaeological evidence shows that the chrysanthemum has been cultivated in its native China for more than 2500 years. From earliest times the Chinese used it medicinally and as an herb. Buddhist monks imported it to Japan where it was prized as an ornamental. Eventually it arrived in North America via Europe, hybridization continuing all the while.

Chrysanthemum means "golden flower" in Greek. The species "mums" are daisy-like flowers, mostly yellow, some pink. Now there are also hybrids in every shade of red, purple and orange. Whites and bi-colours are available too.



A grouping of Chrysanthemums
photo by Kelly Noel

The bloom is actually many small complete flowers, called florets, densely packed into a single head. Each head has a center disk of short florets which are

surrounded and sometimes hidden by the longer petals, the ray florets.

Hybrid mums have a variety of bloom types. There are globes of varying sizes with densely packed flat rays, curved up (incurve) or down (reflex), hiding the disk. Small ones are called pompoms. The rays on decorative blossoms flare outward but still hide the disk. The disk is visible on daisy types and is prominent and cushion-like on anemone types. Some have tubular rays called "quill" if straight, "spider" if hooked and "spoon-tipped" if the end is flattened.



An anemone form Chrysanthemum
photo by Kelly Noel

Mums are short-day plants. Blooming is triggered by longer periods of darkness each day. Their natural bloom time is early September to late October depending on the cultivar. Since August, there have been pots of mums, many already in bloom, for sale in garden centres and supermarkets. Greenhouse growers have manipulated these into blooming early, by controlling the temperature and the amount of light they receive.

These plants are often labeled "hardy" but they probably will not return next year in your Ottawa garden. Best treat these as an-

nuals because they have been "forced": their energy concentrated on bud formation and blooming early. This is at the expense of the root system which remains underdeveloped and is unlikely to have enough reserves to fuel regrowth next spring. There are hybrid cultivars hardy enough to survive a normal winter here. The best bet is to buy and plant seedlings in the spring. Pick cultivars for their bloom type and colour – perhaps a pink spoon-tipped anemone or yellow decorative. Those that bloom in early September will give a nice display until hard frost.

Plant in a sunny spot (not under a street light) and water well. They are heavy feeders so, to keep them vigorous, apply liquid fertilizer every month until buds form. These mums will bloom on their own schedule and develop a healthy root system, making them more likely to survive the winter. Deadhead spent blossoms but leave the foliage while it is still green. Mulch well.



Chrysanthemum 'Monica' & C. 'Bonnie'
photo by Kelly Noel

Mums look great in the garden and are long-lasting cut flowers. The Chinese thought the chrysanthemum had many therapeutic benefits. The sight of one covered with blossoms on an Autumn day certainly lifts my spirits!

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October TO DO List

- Deadhead plants that will self-seed and become invasive, but leave some seed-heads for winter interest and as a source of food for birds.
- Put stakes in the ground around plants that you will be wrapping for the winter, but resist the urge to wrap and protect trees and shrubs too early – wait until the ground freezes so that rodents have found their winter home already.
- Continue to water newly planted trees and shrubs until the ground freezes.
- Store garden ornaments for the winter – especially ceramic ones that will absorb water and break.
- Bird baths can be put away or turned over as the temperature drops below freezing OR consider installing a bird bath warmer so the birds have a source of fresh water all winter.
- Pond clean-up and winter preparations should be started. Remove annual water plants after they have been hit by frost, remove and store the water pump and install a bubbler or pond deicer to keep a hole in the ice to allow gases from decomposing plant matter to escape.

Tip of the Month:

Don't bag and throw out the natural mulch that nature provides. Leaves should be added to compost or left to decompose on garden beds. To accelerate decomposition, shred the leaves. Commercial leaf shredders use a nylon string, spinning at a high speed to shred dry leaves into tiny pieces.

If you don't own a leaf shredder, improvise by mowing over a one-inch layer of leaves with a lawn mower, at its highest setting and

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton



Where to find us this month for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1-3 pm

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

- monitored daily
- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

CLINICS:

No advice clinics until next Spring.

SPEAKING EVENTS:

October in the Garden – October 19, 2010 – 7:30 p.m.

Speaker: Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Pretty Street Community Centre, (Corner of Orville & Pretty St.), Stittsville

Hosted by Stittsville-Goulbourn Horticultural Society (guests welcome)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: 613-836-1491

For more information on Master Gardeners, visit our website:

<http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>

using a bagger. Another alternative is to place 12-15cm of leaves in a garbage pail and then run a “whipper snipper” in the garbage pail until the leaves are finely shredded.



Before & after shredding leaves with a commercial leaf shredder.

A 2.5cm layer of shredded leaves will make great mulch for garden

beds. Finely shredded leaves break down very quickly and enhance the soil with organic matter.

A 20-25cm layer of leaves can be used to insulate marginally hardy plants or recent transplants. Do this only after the ground has frozen and rodents have found their winter homes or they just may move in to your cozy layer of leaf mulch and your plant could become a tasty snack. When a thick layer of leaves is used as an insulator, it is important to remove the remaining leaves in the Spring.

If you have a home composter, set aside a garbage bag full of dry leaves so that you can layer them with the kitchen scraps through the winter to keep the carbon/nitrogen mix in balance.

*Autumn is a second Spring,
when every leaf is in flower.*

~Albert Camus (1913-1960)