

GROWING MUMS

The Fall Favorite

Mums are members of the daisy family that flower late summer to fall. There are dozens of cultivars but Nebraska grown mums are compact garden mums. Their popularity is based on their brightly colored, long lasting fall blooms. The colors can range from white, yellow, bronze, pink, red, purple, or bi-color. Some have blooms like buttons while others may resemble daisy like blooms. Mums are easy to grow in raised beds or borders, but if grown in containers they are not winter hardy. Mums usually set buds when night temperatures drop and the hours of darkness increase in late summer. Some varieties may set buds too early and bloom in August. To prevent this, remove all flower buds that develop before early July. Pinching keeps plants compact and dense and prevents the plant from pulling apart when in bloom.

Site Selection

Mums require well drained, fertile soil and regular watering due to shallow root systems. Full sun or half day sun is best. They can grow in any soil capable of producing good vegetables or perennials. During wet humid periods, soil-borne diseases may injure plants in heavy clay soils. Winter kill is likely if water stands around the crowns during winter thawing and freezing periods. Never leave a depression around a plant where water might collect. Plants grown in semi-shady areas tend to grow taller and bloom later in the fall.

Soil Preparation

Spade or till the soil to a depth of 12-15". Add compost to increase the air space in the heavy clay. Perlite should be mixed in with the compost and soil to aid in drainage. An organic fertilizer such as bone meal or super phosphate may be worked into the soil prior to planting. A balanced granular garden fertilizer such as *Gardeners Special* should be used at least once a year to ensure healthy foliage and abundant blooms.



Planting

Plant so the top 1/2" of the root ball is slightly above the soil line. Cover the root ball with a 1" layer of mulch and keep it away from the stems. It is recommended to use *Superthrive* and *Root Stimulator* when planting to get the roots off to a good start.

Caring for Young Plants

Newly planted mums should be kept well-watered until established. The soil should be kept uniformly moist, not soaking wet during this period. Be sure to check the moisture inside the root ball of the larger mums to be certain that the root ball itself is moist, not just the surrounding soil area. One deep watering per week encourages deep root penetration. After the mums have finished blooming after killing frosts, trim the dead stems off to about 2" above the ground. Then loosely cover with a couple inches of pine needles or wood mulch for winter protection. Some experts recommend not cutting the stems until early spring. Be sure to remove the mulch from the crown when new growth begins the following spring.