

## **Extension Notes**

Personal Column for September 3, 2009

By Gary Hall, ISU Regional Extension Education Director

### **Mum's the Word for Fall Color**

Chrysanthemums, or mums, are a dependable and colorful staple for the fall garden according to Cindy Haynes, Extension Horticulturalist for Iowa State University. Let me share with you her thoughts on how you can use mums to liven up containers on decks, patios or front door stoops and brighten beds and borders. Thousands of cultivars of mums are available for planting in the landscape or decorating your doorstep.

The shape or arrangement of petals is used to classify Chrysanthemums. Each form or shape is available in at least a dozen different colors -- the choices are overwhelming! Since mums are primarily fall bloomers, it is not surprising that seasonal colors such as orange, gold, maroon and burgundy are popular; but plants are also available in white, pink, lavender, yellow and other more pastel hues.

Twenty years ago mums were generally a one- to two-foot tall plant, both in the garden or in a container. Today there are tall cultivars, reaching over three feet tall, and dwarf cultivars, staying below a foot. Plants may be upright and shrub-like or creep more like a groundcover. Read the label carefully to make sure the mature size and shape of the plant will fit your space.

Hardy and non-hardy cultivars of mums are available to the public. Don't assume that the mums you buy in the pretty baskets and bows from a florist or supermarket are hardy -- these are usually not hardy in Iowa. Instead, look for "garden" or "hardy" mums. These plants are often put on display outdoors at garden centers, discount stores and some florists. Look for cultivars bred in Minnesota. Cultivar names that start with "Minn" or even the shrub-like "Maxi-Mum" types are from Minnesota and have the genetics to survive an Iowa winter.

But being genetically capable of surviving the winter doesn't ensure survival. If you want to keep these plants for many years to come -- plant them in a sunny, well-drained location. They require a period of establishment in the ground in the months of September and October to establish good root systems in preparation for winter.

Whether planted in a solid mass of a single color or many colors mixed together to form a living tapestry in the garden, fall just wouldn't be the same without chrysanthemums. No other flower can provide such a dramatic climax for your landscape before the arrival of winter.

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