

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian Mum is the Word!



A bush of purple mums. Photos Cynthia Brian

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The blooms are long-lasting, and the plants are low maintenance. Cutting mums for floral arrangements and bouquets assures that my house is always filled with spicy scents and sweet style.

Native to Asia, China was the first to cultivate chrysanthemums over 2500 years ago for their medicinal properties, though I'm not sure how they were used as medicine, as the entire plant is considered toxic to people and pets. Although mums have been a mainstay of funeral wreaths in the United States, globally they represent rich symbolism in many other cultures. Today in Asia, mums symbolize longevity, vitality, and immortality. It is thought that this resilient flower with its brilliant colors equates to the everlasting nature of life and honors our ancestors.

In Japan, the chrysanthemum is revered for its blooming beauty representing perfection and rejuvenation. The Kiku Matsuri or Chrysanthemum Festival honors this noble plant with the Imperial family using it as the respectful image of their lineage.



A fountain decorated for fall with pumpkins, gourds, and squash.

It was in the 17th century that mums were introduced into European culture, where they quickly enamored gardeners as cut flowers. Chrysanthemums became associated with romance, affection, sincerity, and love.

At this time of year, as Halloween approaches, chrysanthemums take on an added role. They bring positive energy and good luck to ward off the demons and negative energy of the ghosts, gremlins, and goblins.

Although the best time to plant mums is possibly spring, I prefer to buy small 4-inch pots of hardy blooming chrysanthemums now so that I can coordinate my garden color scheme with my outdoor décor. Nurseries and garden centers have many types to choose from, so choose the varieties that most interest you. You'll find pompons, anemones, spoons, and even newer series, each with different leaf and flower petals. Plant in a location that receives full sunlight, which is six to eight hours per day. Protect them from windy areas. Mums prefer slightly acidic soil enriched with organic matter that drains well. They don't like to be waterlogged, but they don't like being completely dry either. Keep the soil moist. Pinching the tips of young plants helps them grow bushier with increased buds. As our temperatures drop, mulch around the base of the plants to protect the roots.

Enjoy the blooms for eight to 12 weeks, sometimes more. When flowers fade as winter arrives, cut back the foliage to the ground. These perennials will resurrect next year, offering you another season of optimism. Their normal life cycle is four to five years, but you can increase your odds of growing eternal hardy mums by dividing the roots every three to four years or cultivating by stem cuttings in the spring. If you love the mums you are growing, doing this will get you identical copies.

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This garden boasts a variety of mums in the bud.