



Mum's the Word

September 27, 2012

Chrysanthemums are wonderful perennial flowers that come in many different cultivars and colors that show up in our fall landscapes. They do well in Georgia when planted either in the fall or spring. Here is some information, a few tips, and descriptions of some cultivars.

Mums can grow up to 3 feet tall depending on the variety. They prefer rich, well drained soils in full sun for the best growth. Mums can also be quite demanding of water especially when newly planted or flowering and can require frequent fertilizing for best results. When planting in the fall, water new plants about three times a week. If plants are established, adequate rainfall should provide enough water but drought conditions will require watering. Plants should be top-dressed with a complete fertilizer at planting and can be fertilized weekly during the spring and summer. For the best looking newly planted mums, they should be planted in the spring to provide a more full plant by fall. An important tip pertains to pruning during the spring and summer months. To help promote a fuller plant, pinch the top .5 to 1 inch of new growth to cause more branching. You should start this practice once a plant is about 6 inches tall and continue every four to six weeks until August. Towards the end of summer, mums will begin to put on flower buds so you don't want to pinch these off. Mums will begin to bloom soon after and should continue until the first killing frost. To protect the plants for the winter months, make sure the roots are watered and that a thick layer of mulch is put down. In early spring, remove the dead plant material before new spring growth starts.

Although mums are relatively easy to care for, they do suffer from some common diseases such as powdery mildew, blight, leaf spot, and rust. Most of these can be controlled by removing infected plant tissue and use of over the counter garden fungicide products. Viruses such as tomato spotted wilt and mosaic can infect mums but control of viral diseases is not possible, only prevention of insects that carry these diseases. Pests such as aphids and spider mites can cause problems for mums but use of insecticides does not always provide adequate control because of the large numbers of these insects. There are also several natural predators that will attack these insect populations and insecticides will kill those as well.

Chrysanthemums are classified according to their shape and arrangement of petals and there are several bloom types available including singles (daisy), anemones, doubles (decorative), pompons, and cushions. Mums also come in various colors including white (Chablis, Encore, Linda, Patriot, and Tracy), yellow (Jessica, Yellow Sarah, Allure, and Yellow Jacket), bronze (Cheyenne, Denise, Eclipse, Flame, and Oriole), pink and purple (Barbara, Bordeaux, Cabernet, Debonair, Lynn, Tinkerbelle, Stargazer, and Tripoli), coral (Grenadine, Radiant Lynn, and Serenade), and red (Bravo, Garnet, Ruby Mound, and Salsa). Each of these cultivars will have varying times of bloom, flower shapes, and growth forms so check into which variety may work best for your situation.