



Professional Tips for Caring for your Mum

Most mums are sold in large containers so they can decorate an entryway or add a punch of color to a fall display. You can keep garden mums in containers or plant them directly in your garden beds. When grown in a container, fall mums shouldn't need additional fertilization through frost. Just take care that the plant's given sufficient water and isn't allowed to wilt – wilting shortens the life of the blooms, most noticeably by faded color. To avoid wilting, check the soil every day. If it's dry, water thoroughly.

Depending on the weather and container size, they may require a daily drink.

Even after the flowers in your containers die, mums can still be planted in the garden as a perennial. Mums don't like wet feet, so select a well-drained location. Then loosen the soil around the edges of the root ball and place the plant in a hole just deep enough so that the top of the root ball is even with the soil line.

Where in the garden you plant your mums is up to you, but we recommend a sunny spot, preferably with a southern exposure. Planting near the house or near shrub plantings offers some screening protection from the wind. The thing to remember is that mums are "short-day" plants, meaning they flower when the hours of darkness are greater than the hours of daylight. So don't plant them directly beneath a streetlight or commonly used porch light that would artificially lengthen the hours of "daylight." (Otherwise the plant growth in the following years will be leggy rather than compact, and flowering will be delayed.)

Mums that are planted in the ground shouldn't need as much water as those kept in a container, since the roots can find water in the surrounding soil. But make sure newly planted mums are kept moist for two to three weeks after transplanting while they become established in their new environment. After they're established, watering requirements are minimal – just "listen" to the plant by following its cues. If you notice the leaves start to look droopy, water thoroughly. No fertilization is necessary in fall, but a general-purpose fertilizer application may be helpful come spring.

At frost, your garden mums will "die back," meaning that the leaves turn black and the stems dry out. When this happens, don't panic! Your plants may look dead aboveground, but they're very much alive below the soil's surface. In fact, you should resist the urge to cut off the dead branches. They provide additional winter protection for the plant, and they can be removed in spring, when new shoots begin growing. In most cases, mulching for winter protection isn't necessary in the Southeast but in cooler regions, it's important to apply mulch or mound the soil around the base for winter protection.

Q: What is pinching?

A: "Pinching" is a term used to describe light pruning that encourages branching. Mums should be pinched in the summer when they reach a height of 6-8 inches. Pruning shears can be used to cut the shoot tips back to a height of 4-5 inches. This will result in a compact plant with more flowers.