

# HOME GROUNDS FACT SHEET



Cornell University  
Cooperative Extension  
Nassau County



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## Chrysanthemums

### Choosing varieties

For the best results, pick your mums for height, color and bloom type. Genetics plays the primary role in determining the ultimate size of the plants and its blooms. Don't try to keep naturally tall growers short, it just won't work. Similarly, don't try to force small flowered types to produce large blooms.

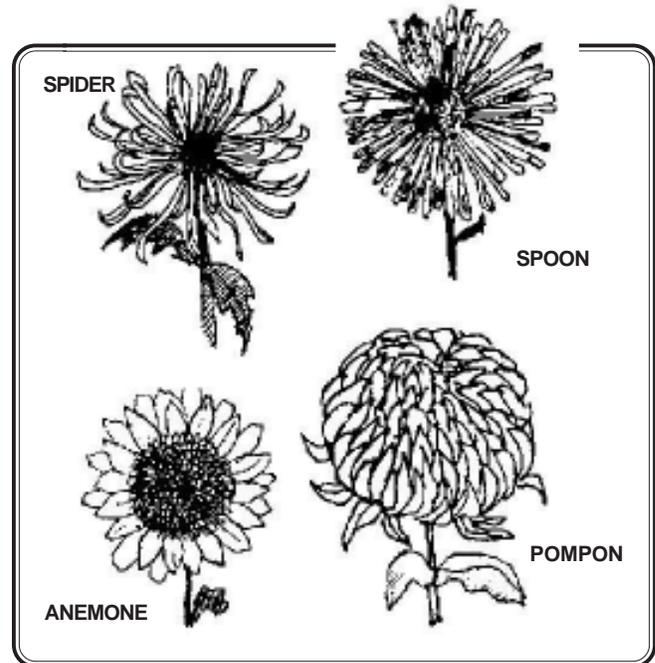
For a pleasing effect, choose tall varieties for the rear of your bed, maybe against the house. Plant short growers toward the front. Mix the colors and the bloom types. Although not always available at garden centers, there are at least six garden mum bloom forms:

- pompom
- decorative
- spider
- anemone
- single (daisy)
- spoon

Exhibition mums (usually taller and a little less hardy) also come in reflex, quill, and incurve shaped blooms. Lastly, give some thought to the timing of the flowers. Most named varieties are labeled as to their blooming season. Given the unpredictability of the frost on Long Island, early and mid-season types are recommended. Purchase your mums in **May** or **June**. Pick small plants. They will grow very quickly if treated well. Buying large plants will only produce scrawny, unattractive results.

### Location

The ideal spot for your mums will have three features: full sun, good drainage and little root competition. At a minimum, your mums should get five hours of full sun each day. Shadier areas promote tall, thin plants with fewer flowers. Our sandy Long Island soils are fine for chrysanthemum growing. Avoid low, damp areas where they would get wet feet. Since mums are heavy feeders, their roots must draw nutrients from the soil. Avoid planting them near large trees and shrub roots.



### Preparing the bed

Dig the soil to a depth of 12". Thoroughly incorporate peat moss and/or compost. The amount you add isn't critical, but don't be stingy. For a 2' x 10' bed, three bushels would not be too much. Once these have been added, test the soil for pH (Contact your local Cooperative Extension office for more information on soil testing). Add limestone as needed to achieve a reading of about 6.5. Next, add fertilizer to the soil. For a 2' x 10' bed, add 1/2 lb. of 5-10-5 (or 5-10-10) and 3/4 lb. of superphosphate. Don't think that more is better! Nutrients, air and water must all be in balance for optimum growth. Although not strictly necessary, other soil additives such as composted manure, leaf mold, gypsum, perlite, vermiculite or greensand can be added according to their directions.

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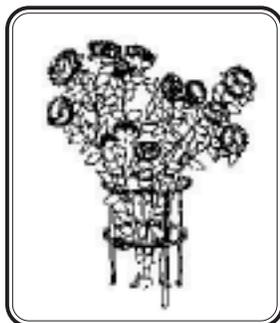
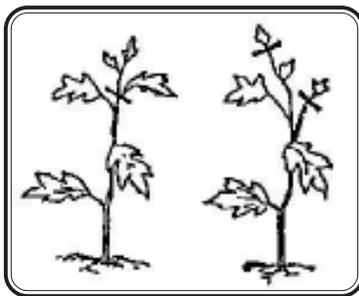
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### Caring for your mums

Plant your mums immediately after purchasing and water thoroughly. Never let them dry out, especially during the first few weeks. During May and June, water at least weekly. Once the heat of July arrives and the plants become bushy, water twice a week. About a week after planting, pinch out (remove) the growing tip of each stem 1/4" (see illustration). This causes the plant to branch. In order to produce compact, bushy mums, pinch all of the new growth when it is 4" long. Continue pinching until August 1. Beginning in June, provide extra food in the form of water soluble fertilizer. The formula is not critical as long as it can be used for outdoor, flowering plants. Do not use acid type fertilizers. Mix according to instructions.

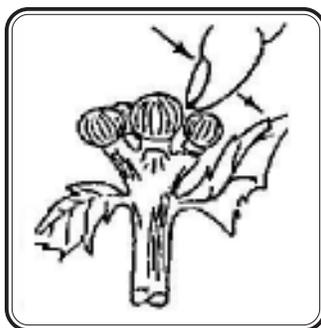


Continue to feed monthly through September. In order to discourage weeds and conserve soil moisture, mulch the bed soon after planting. Insects and diseases, though not serious problems for mums, can be controlled with standard garden sprays, used according to the manufacturer's instructions. As

soon as the plants are 1' tall, place a few stakes securely in the ground 6" from the main stem. The plant will grow within the stakes and maintain a bushy, upright habit. Use twist ties as needed.

### Disbudding

In order to achieve large flowers, you must purchase exhibition types. Limit the number of stems on each plant to no more than five. Prune off all of the rest starting in mid-July. When the buds grow to small pea size, disbud (remove all but the top bud) each stem. Stake and tie each stem.



### Winter care

Mums are hardy perennials. To increase the chances of wintering your mums, cut the plants back after flowering to within 4" of the ground. Add a covering of mulch (3" to 6") to the entire bed after the ground is frozen. Evergreen boughs, chopped leaves, salt hay or pine needles are all good possibilities.

### Second year care

Chrysanthemums grow best from new roots produced during the current season. The best results can be achieved by planting new mum cuttings each year (see below). If this is inconvenient, divide the plants in the spring when they are about 4"-6" tall. Retain the vigorous side shoots with new growth. Discard most of the plant. Adjust the pH and add fertilizer to the bed before replanting the divisions.

### Taking cuttings

In the spring when the weather is warm and new mum growth is 6" tall, remove the top 4" of each stem (snap the stem with a quick bend). This is a cutting. Make 1 1/2" deep holes in a well-watered pot containing perlite, vermiculite, sand, or soil-less mix or any combination of these. Place one cutting in each hole. Rooting hormones are not usually necessary with mums, although they can be used without harm. Set the pot in a warm, bright location (**not direct sunlight**). Keep the soil moist and mist occasionally, if possible. Do not overwater. Within 3 weeks the cuttings will have rooted. A gentle tug on the cutting will tell you if rooting has occurred.

*Reference: Richard C. Heeseler - L.I. Chrysanthemum Society*

### Chrysanthemum sources on Long Island

1. Most local garden centers
2. The Long Island Horticultural Society
3. The Long Island Chrysanthemum Society—provides in-depth advice about growing mums on Long Island.