

EXTENSION NOTES



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Mums Make the Fall Garden Pop with Color

This is the time of year when farm stores and garden centers tempt us with big and little pots of fall mums, drawing our eyes to their bright yellow, gold and burgundy flowers. Mums are an easy way to bring new life to the fall garden or spruce up your front porch.

Mums are a common fall decorative plant, because fewer daylight hours and longer nights triggers flowering. Nurseries often do this artificially by pulling dark cloth over the plants in late summer and early fall, which stimulates blooming. If you have mums growing in the landscape, the natural decrease in daylength as fall approaches will do the trick as well.

There are dozens of varieties, but generally mums can be identified in one of two groups, the garden or hardy mums, and the cutting variety. These latter are usually referred to as florist mums. Florist mums are generally tender and will not survive a winter in the garden.

If you want to enjoy blooms for the longest period of time, buy mums that are covered in buds, with only a few that have opened. It's always good to buy a plant that has one or two blooms open, so you're sure of the color you're purchasing. You should be able to enjoy flowers for two to three weeks or more. Water the base of the plant, not the foliage and flowers. Water on flowers may promote floral diseases that will shorten the flower display.

Mums perform well in containers and will flourish inside or out. Many hardy varieties can also be planted after they bloom, so you may be able to enjoy their color the following year.

If you're planning to enjoy your garden mum inside, find a good location near a south-facing window, out of direct sunlight and away from drafts caused by heating or air conditioning vents that tend to dry the flowers. A bright spot, with indirect light is the best. Keep the soil moist, but not soggy.

Mums prefer moderate temperatures at night, about 60 degrees Fahrenheit. If frost is expected, protect outdoor mums by moving them under cover overnight.

Once the plants have finished blooming, they will stop growing. You can either contribute them to your compost pile or plant them in your garden. Be aware, however, even the best gardeners often find that mums

planted in the fall fail to establish in our Kentucky climate. Some may, but most do not. Mums as landscape plants tend to do much better when planted in the spring. However, you may need to visit your local garden center or shop from a mail-order source for early mum plants since they are not generally sold in the mass market in spring.

If you choose to plant them in the fall after they finish blooming, choose a spot that will get about six hours of direct sunlight a day during the growing season. Mums that don't receive enough sunlight will grow leggy and have more stems than blooms. Cut back all the stems to about 8 inches. Mix some compost into the soil, and dig a hole no deeper than the depth of the pot the mum is growing in. Keep the top level of the garden soil at the same point on the plant as the container soil was. Mums should be spaced 18 to 24 inches apart, since mature plants can become a good size in the garden. Water them in, then cover the ground around the plant with a thick layer of mulch, keeping the mulch from piling up against the stem.

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Upcoming Events:

- The **Grayson Farmer's Market** is open on Saturdays from 9:00 AM until noon. The market is in the shed behind the Extension Office. The **Olive Hill Farmer's Market** is in the Save-a-Lot parking lot and is open on Saturdays and Wednesdays at 8:00 AM and Mondays at 3:00 PM until sell out each day.
- **Northeast Area Livestock Association** – Tuesday, October 29th @ 6:00 PM; Topic – Livestock Drinking Water; Speaker: Dr. Steve Higgins, UK Director of Environmental Compliance
- **Beginning & Small Farmer School** – Friday, November 1st from 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM @ Morehead State University Farm Arena Classroom – Call 474-6686 to register.
- **Little Sandy Beekeepers Association** – Tuesday, November 5th @ 6:30 PM; Topic – Baking with Honey & Using a Refractometer