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Care for Fall Mums

Many people use mums to decorate their homes in the fall by leaving them in pots and treating as an annual for decoration. The best time to purchase mums is after temperatures have started to drop (preferably under 79°F highs), which usually means after Labor Day to the end of September. If mums are just starting to show color, lots of buds with only a few open blooms, you will get the longest time of enjoyment (at least 4-6 weeks).

Full Sun – minimum of 6 hours direct sunlight, morning or afternoon sun, is required to get biggest blooms and full color. If mums are in a shady spot with less than 6 hours of sun, small buds may not open at all. Once mums are in full bloom, they can be placed in a shady spot for several weeks before foliage turns yellow or gets weak.

Fertilizer – if the mum still has lots of small buds that haven't opened, fertilize with Daniels 10-4-3 (2 teaspoons per gallon) with every 6 waterings and water with plain water on the 7th watering to make sure buds continue to develop into big, beautiful blooms. Once mums are in full bloom, fertilizer is no longer needed.

Temperature – Mums will last longer in cool temperatures (ideally 40-55°F), so outside with a little afternoon shade is perfect, since hotter temps will make them mature too fast. Mums will take temperatures down to 28°F without protection, but if temperatures are expected below 28°F, you can either bring them into a garage or cover with a sheet overnight.

Water – The best way to determine if a mum needs water is by lifting the pot and telling by the weight: lift pot after 1st watering to determine the weight of the pot when it's wet. When you lift the pot and it feels light it needs water. Water thoroughly until it drips through the bottom drainage holes.

If temperatures are over 80°F and mums are still developing buds/blooms, pots may require watering every day. Don't expect rain to be sufficient (too much of the rain is shed by the foliage). Once temperatures drop below 60°F and the mum is in full bloom, they are not actively growing, so they may only require watering a couple of times per week.

Over-wintering – "Decorative" mums have been bred to have unique colors & pom-pom flowers, so they often are not as hardy and able to survive our winters. The Mammoth mums are the only truly perennial mum in our area, but still need to be planted by early September, so that they have enough time to root out before frost. Putting 4" of hardwood mulch over the plant after the ground freezes may help provide more winter protection to the tender roots.