

# Mums the word



If, like most people, you love a pretty chrysanthemum this handy guide to the handsome flower is your ideal Sunday read



Plant your cuttings latest by end August if you want the blooms by late Nov-Dec. If you plant in Sept, it will bloom in Jan-Feb. But if you think that you will plant it in Fall, then you've missed the bus by 3-4 months!

them differently. Make little hole in the middle, wet with water and put the root touching the bottom. Cover it well. Push it gently around the stem and sprinkle little water all around. Put the pot in shade for at least seven days. Water it when surface of the soil is dry. If all goes well, you can see new leaves in 10-20 days.

**Fertiliser:** Feed the plant with good doses of organic fertiliser. Use coarsely ground castor seed (aandi ka khalli). Add 1 tbsp seeds weekly till you see the buds. After that you can use once in 15 days. In addition, add 1 tsp DAP every 15 days. Change it to 1 tsp super phosphate after budding.

**Watering, pruning & staking:** Keep the surface wet, so water as and when needed. Prune the bunch variety when the plant is 5-to-6-inches high. Prune regularly depending on what kind of bunch you want. For large variety, don't prune the stem but remove the branches coming out regularly. When buds come, keep only one or two buds to get a big size bloom. The stem is not strong to carry the flower's weight. So, stakes of bamboo should be used to prop it when it's above 6 inches.

**Pest protection:** Spray a common pesticide regularly once you see the pests on the leaves. Mix 2 ml pesticide in 1 l water and spray once in 15 days.

If you have a garden, follow the same procedure. Just ensure that you protect the plant against excess water during rainy season. Also, don't keep artificial lights around the pots.

*The writer is a keen gardener and has been growing chrysanthemums for 40+ years*

## HOW TO GROW

**For pots:** Take a clay pot (8-inch diameter), fill the bottom with small bricks of 1-2 inches. Start with 12 or 24 pots (if you have space), because cuttings are sold by dozens.

**Soil:** Make sure it's a bit sandy. Tip: a slight reddish or yellowish colour is the sign that it's sandy. Mix half soil and half compost. Mix 2 tbsp neem khalli (coarsely ground neem cake) as an insecticide and add 1 tsp of DAP (diammonium phosphate) in the mix – both sold at nurseries. Fill the pot loosely with the mix one inch below the rim.

**Planting:** When buying cuttings, check for proper roots. Tip: Always buy some extra because chances are some may die after planting. If you are going for a mix of large and small varieties, mark the pots well as you'll be pruning

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Lallan P Singh

"Grow chrysanthemums and be happy for life." — Chinese Proverb

Those who love flowers — and very few of us don't — often compare chrysanthemums or 'mums' (as the Americans call it) with rose. A rose is a rose but mums come a close second. When it comes to a point-by-point battle, rose's fragrance is its only trump card, but in terms of variety and petal arrangements, mums are the last word. And the best bit: it grows very well in pots.

Mums appear in Chinese writings in 15th century BC - they used to call it chu. It is first mentioned in Japan around 8th century AD. The single petal variety was adopted as crest and seal of the emperor. It first appeared in the western world around 17th century. In 1753, Swedish Botanist Karl Linnaeus joined two Greek words, chryso (meaning gold) and anthemion (meaning flower) to coin chrysanthemum.

