

GROWERTALKS

Culture Notes

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Upscale Mum Projects for Fall

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Over the years, a key trend that has emerged in the marketing of garden mums is the production of larger finished containers for fall sales. This provides consumers with instant decoration and less hands-on gardening.

Flower color and style are important to consumers, but don't overlook the additional sales-building impact that choices in product forms can make. Many growers and retailers now offer garden mums in a wide variety of larger containers, including 12- and 16-in. pots, bushel baskets, hanging baskets, color bowls and window boxes.

Getting started

First, choose a variety that will finish within the size specs you'll need and will be strong enough to hold together during shipping. Some varieties are better at this than others, so consult your propagator's information on varieties that are best suited to the pot or container you'll be producing.

There are two schools of thought in large pot culture: Use fewer cuttings and plant earlier, or use more cuttings and plant later. Some growers who are very skilled in garden mum culture prefer the former method.

Success is in the feeding

To paraphrase a real estate adage, the three keys to success with large pot garden mums are fertilization, fertilization and fertilization. Constant liquid feeding starting the day of planting is best. Use 300 to 400 ppm nitrogen from a complete fertilizer such as 20-20-20 or 20-10-20, etc. The first five weeks of feeding is the key to the entire crop! Never compromise on this step. A good fertilizer program reduces plant stress and your stress.

Depending on the pot size and your target plant size, the fertilizer concentration can be reduced after the second stage of branching has occurred. Once you've reached three-fourths of your desired plant size, you can reduce frequency from constant to twice per week to control size, build plant strength and speed timing.

Other keys to remember

Be sure plants are adequately spaced on the bench. Lack of space will reduce plant size and change the plant habit from well rounded to upright. Keep a careful schedule of planting dates, as well. Early varieties have less time to grow before budding, so plant them first. Use plant vigor as a guide for which of the later

varieties to plant first. Other factors such as the number of cuttings used and the use of growth regulators are dependent on your individual product specs and requirements. Some growers use no PGRs at all.

Asters: the perfect match for garden mums

The popularity of asters as a sister crop to garden mums has grown steadily for a number of good reasons. Not only can they be grown in much the same way as mums (8-in. aster production is the same as that for 8-in. garden mums), they come in colors that aren't available in garden mums, such as raspberry/pink and blue. They're versatile, adapt well to a wide range of containers, and are popular for summer shade programs.

Mark Smith is mum breeder for Yoder Brothers, Inc. For more information on Yoder Brothers' mums and asters, visit www.yoderbrothers.com.