

Growing Tips 7

FALL FLOWERS

Mums + Annuals



Seize a cooler moment in August or early September to plant fresh flowering plants. **Chrysanthemums star in the fall color show, but don't overlook pansies, violas and asters.**

Check out perennials such as the compact cultivar of **boltonia**, 'Jim Crockett', with showy purple flowers, or a **sedum** with purple, pink, green or white blooms. These plants bloom now, well past the first frosts. **Plant from mid-August through mid-September.**

Frost-tolerant annuals include **diascia**, related to snapdragons, and perfect for hanging baskets. Calendula, snapdragon, and verbena pop with color. **Flowering cabbage and kale**, as well as **ornamental**

grasses add texture, form and contrast to fall containers or garden beds.

Even tender annuals, such as scarlet sage, zinnias, and cold-hardy petunias and their cousins – **calibrachoa** – stand a chance of blooming through October in sunny protected spots - on a porch, or close to the south side of a building. Their bright splashes of color light up the shorter days.

Sun makes a difference.

As the days get shorter, places that were sunny might get more shade. **Look for 6 hours of sun for fall flowers.** The sun encourages blooming in cool weather and dries out wet soil after fall rains.

Plant in containers or garden beds.

To rejuvenate **containers, remove the plant material, including the roots.** Add fresh potting soil before installing mums or hardy annuals. Apply water-soluble fertilizer at planting, and for a few weeks thereafter.

In **garden beds, remove unwanted plants.**

Turn the soil to loosen before planting. Incorporate organic matter, such as 3" – 4" of compost or peat moss, and all-purpose fertilizer at the recommended rate.

Plant mums, asters, grasses and flowering cabbages 18" – 24" apart; plant pansies and most other annuals 6" – 8" apart. Avoid further applications of fertilizer, which can stimulate new, frost-prone growth.

Water the plants 1/2 hour before planting, then tap them out of the pots or packs. If the root ball is compacted, poke your thumbs into the root ball and gently **wedge the roots**

apart about an inch to encourage the roots to extend into the new soil. For a large root mass, do this in a few places. **Press the soil firmly around the roots to ensure good soil to root contact.**

Water with an all-purpose fertilizer solution to settle and moisten the soil around the roots. **Plants need less water as temperatures drop. Water only when the top 1" of soil is dry to the touch.** Cold, wet soil can lead to disease problems.

What about overwintering?

Hardy chrysanthemums, pansies and other fall perennials can overwinter in well-drained soil, rich in organic matter. Keep in mind that **not all cultivars of mums will overwinter in Massachusetts.** To encourage over-wintering, plant in September or earlier, **mulch with evergreen branches or pine needles after the soil freezes** to prevent alternate freezing and thawing. Plants in containers will generally not overwinter.

Eye Catching Color and Texture

Combine mums with flowering kale and asters. **Mums also look terrific with ornamental grasses.**



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