

FALL GARDEN MUMS & ASTERS

Planting

Plant mums and asters in a sunny location (at least a half-day of sun), in a fertile, well-drained soil. Soils can be improved by adding compost, peat moss or other organic matter.

Don't plant asters too close to each other or other plants as they need 'breathing room' to prevent mold or mildew.

Containers of mums and asters can be placed in any location where a splash of color is desired, but will grow best in a sunny location.

Watering

Rainfall in many areas is sufficient to keep your garden mums and asters growing well. During dry spells, water as needed to keep plants from wilting. Always thoroughly water any freshly planted garden mums and asters.

If planting in the fall, no fertilizer is needed. However, if planting during the growing season, add a general purpose fertilizer such as *Espoma Plant-tone*, an organic time-release fertilizer.

Pinching for Better Blooms

Pinch in early spring to encourage branching for

shorter, fuller plants with more blossoms in the fall. In the spring as soon as the new growth is 4 to 6 inches tall, use your thumbnail and index finger to remove or 'pinch' about 1/2 of the new growth at the top of each shoot.

Repeat this procedure through the summer whenever new shoots are 3 to 5 inches long. (Stop pinching around mid- to late-July.)

The repeated pinching of new shoots is important for developing plants. This will help plants to be sturdy and full of flowers in the fall. After the last pinch, your mum or aster will grow to be more than double in size.

Winter Protection

Keep the soil around your mums and asters moist as winter approaches. There is no need to prune back plants until the following spring. Mulch the plants after several hard frosts.

In the spring, remove any old stems (a rake works fine) and gradually remove the mulch.

Dividing

Asters and mums should be divided every three years. The recommended time to do it is early spring, as soon as you start to see some new green growth.

