

Yard and Garden – October 20, 2012- Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

Having experienced a number of killing frosts, most soft-stemmed vegetation has succumbed to the kiss of death. The beautiful flowers and assorted vegetables we enjoyed throughout this past summer are now nothing more than memories. Today, they exist as lifeless, limp, blackened dead vegetation, ready for the compost heap.

Although such a setting seems somewhat dismal, there is a bright side. In spite of the recent frosts taking their toll, a number of stellar performers continue to sparkle in October's crisp autumn weather. One such player is a flowering plant we call the chrysanthemum — more commonly referred to as a mum.

Almost to the date one year ago, I devoted my column to this remarkable group of flowering plants. In that article, I listed and described a number of mum varieties and their cultural care. I also included an assortment of chrysanthemum photos taken throughout the Kearney area. One particular photo I featured in that column was that of a phenomenal single mum plant. When I took the photo, the plant was literally covered with thousands of beautiful golden, daisy-like flowers. To my astonishment, that particular plant measured nearly five feet in diameter and three feet in height. Never, had I seen one mum plant of that type reach such an enormous size.



In more grandiose style, it is happening again. Much to my amazement, this year's size seems to dwarf last year's. A few days ago, Georgia Unrein and her son Tim, owners of that particular mum plant gave me a call. I was asked if I had recently driven by their home and noticed their mum plant. I responded, "No, I haven't." They then invited me to take another look. Like last year, the plant was again covered with thousands of beautiful, golden daisy-like flowers. The remarkable difference was the plant now measures well over three feet in height and exceeds six feet in diameter.

Formerly, the genus species of this plant was *Chrysanthemum x morifolium*, but recently it was changed to *Dendranthema grandiflora*. I asked the owners if they knew the cultivar name of their mum, but unfortunately the plant label which originally accompanied the plant was either

discarded or lost. As a result, I do not know its cultivar name, but I do know it is a perennial garden-variety mum, capable of surviving Nebraska's winters. Furthermore, I'm convinced the plant is a cushion mum. Cushion mums are characterized by growing in a mounded, pincushion-like habit, but usually no more than twenty inches tall. This type of mum is well suited for gardens because it doesn't topple over or require staking as taller mums sometimes do. Obviously, this particular plant doesn't know its limits. It just keeps growing larger season after season.

The owners stated no special fertilization was applied. The only cultural care this plant received was adequate water and full sunshine.

As one can see from the photo, the plant is growing in a narrow flower border next to the driveway. The plant not only fills the entire width of the border but hangs over into the driveway by nearly two feet. My hunch is this plant has reached its maximum size. I did notice that its branching gapes a bit and appears not as tight as it was last year. Perhaps this might be caused by gravity because of its enormous size. Only time will tell.



Unfortunately, this plant, like all other soft-stemmed vegetation, will eventually succumb to the kiss of death caused by colder, freezing temperatures. But, for now, this gorgeous mum plant remains a stellar performer in October's crisp autumn weather.