Deadheading Mums

Keeping mums alive during the fall can be a challenge. Especially in our Louisiana 'fall,' where it's still very hot and sunny. The mums that you buy at a nursery around this time of the year have been growing for months! Did you know that? Mums will grow vegetatively during the summer, and then when the days start to get shorter, and the sun sets earlier, they will start to produce flowers. But how can you keep your mums blooming all during the fall season?

Sufficient water is the first place to start. The mums that you bought last week were started sometime in the early summer. By this time of the year, they have a large root system which is likely taking up the entire pot and soaking up a lot of water. And not to mention, if they're living in full sun, the sun will dry them out as well. For mums placed in full sun, water them daily – if there is a hole in the bottom of the planter to allow for proper drainage.

The second thing that will keep them looking fresh is deadheading. You're either like, "Yeah, I know what that means." Or, you think, "What the heck does that mean?" Simply put, deadheading is when you remove the old blooms from a plant. For mums, you can pinch off the old blooms with your fingers, no pruners necessary. But if you don't do this regularly, as the blooms fade, your entire mum plant will look drab. About once a week, pluck off the old flowers to make room for the new ones.

Fertilizing your mums with a water-soluble fertilizer might help a little bit – but it isn't necessary. If your intention is to enjoy your mums for the next month, and then throw them out – there is enough fertilizer in the pot to last until sometime in November.

Mums – you either love them or you hate them. I think they're beautiful! Maybe you don't love them because you've struggled to keep them thriving during the fall season. Keeping them well-watered is crucial. And beyond proper watering, deadheading is very important. Keep those two things in mind, and you will have fresh looking mums all season long.

Written by John MacMillan