

Collector's Corner

From Fall to Frost with 'Christmas Gold'

Andrea Sprott

Mums have never been on my must-have lists, or even very high up on my might-wanna-grow lists. They have long evoked visions of dollar-store plastic floral arrangements peppering memorial parks, or the standard autumn door wreath of grapevine base adorned carelessly with unbelievably colored silk mums, and finished off with a gaudy plaid matching bow. And when I think “collectors’ plants,” mums generally can’t be any farther from that list, either.



Needless to say, I needed much convincing when I obtained my original stock of *Chrysanthemum* ‘Christmas Gold’ from fellow garden geek (and super savvy salesperson) Connie Elkin eight years ago. She knew it as a pass-along plant simply called “the Thanksgiving mum.” I know it now as an autumn garden savior; and for that reason alone, it has invoked in me a whole new appreciation of old-fashioned hardy mums.

Every year, I crave a refreshment of smiling blooms in the garden after I’ve cleared away the carcasses of what the long hot summer has mercilessly baked to a crisp. My botanical prayers are answered as soon as ‘Christmas Gold’ starts blooming, which is usually sometime in mid to late October. Sunshine yellow one-inch daisy buttons flower on dark green

stems to two feet tall with small (to three inches long) slightly hirsute three- to five-lobed leaves. Pinching back mums periodically through late July encourages branching, more blooms, and helps keep plants from getting leggy. Deadheading spent blooms keeps this mum in flower literally for months—until the first really hard frost.

Sometimes pass-along plants become some of the worst thugs of the garden, causing temporary Tourette’s syndrome in even the mildest mannered gardener. Even though it spreads a bit once established, *Chrysanthemum* ‘Christmas Gold’ has never been on my “thug” list. Give *Chrysanthemum* ‘Christmas Gold’ full to part sun in average to rich well-drained soil.

Hardy in USDA Growing Zones 5-9, mums are considered tough as nails (I mean, “drought tolerant”), but they do appreciate consistent moisture, especially in the brutal heat of late summer and early fall. This particular hardy mum has not been bothered by any pest of which I’m aware, which adds to their reputation as a mainstay in the late season garden.

In my south-facing driveway border, *Chrysanthemum* ‘Christmas Gold’ grows and blooms happily with a large variety of plants, including tufts of the spider-web fine foliage of Mexican Feather Grass, *Stipa tenuissima*; various yellow-flowering Daylilies, *Hemerocallis* cvs.; Dwarf Chinese blue-purple Asters, *Callistephus chinensis*; fuzzy gray-green Jerusalem Sage, *Phlomis fruticosa*; and Mystic Spires Blue Sage, *Salvia longispicata* × *farinacea* ‘Balsalmisp’.

I know of no nursery source for *Chrysanthemum* ‘Christmas Gold’, but it is available from the Legacy Plant cart in the Elizabeth Lawrence Garden of Wing Haven Gardens & Bird Sanctuary (www.winghavengardens.com). So bring on the holidays . . . ‘Tis the season for (plant) pleasin’ with ‘Christmas Gold’! AS



Andrea Sprott is an Extension Master Gardener Volunteer with Mecklenburg County, NC. Her low-maintenance suburban garden is home to a vast inventory of plant material. Since November 2010, Andrea has worked as the Lawrence Garden Associate at Wing Haven Gardens & Bird Sanctuary.