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Mum's the Word

It takes months of hard work—and meticulous attention to details—to stage the largest outdoor display of chrysanthemums in the United States.
Chrysanthemums epitomize fall:

A couple of pots of brilliantly colored mums on a front porch are all you really need to set the tone, but mums are magnificent performers en masse. Bellingrath Gardens and Home near Mobile, Alabama, provides spectacular proof with its extravagant display of chrysanthemums every fall. Millions of mums fill flowerbeds, enormous hanging baskets overflowing with mums swing from the branches of stately live oak trees, and blooms cascade from balcony railings. Ornate terra-cotta pots and antique iron urns on the stone terraces are full of mums, and mums trained up into sturdy columns and pyramids punctuate the sweeping flowerbeds.

The mums are nursed, nurtured, shaped, and sheared by a team of expert gardeners who tend and train the plants for 10 months. Then, just as the mums come into bloom, the gardeners gracefully step aside and let the flowers steal the show. The display is at its peak in November: It is a vigorous and refreshing finale to the season.

Bellingrath Gardens and Home was once Walter and Bessie Bellingrath's fishing camp, nestled on the banks of the Fowl River just outside the port city of Mobile. Walter Bellingrath, who made his fortune as Mobile's first Coca-Cola bottler, bought the property in 1917, when the camp was nothing more than a shack on the river. Before long, the couple began transforming their rural retreat into something of a showplace. They planted the grounds with camellias and azaleas, built a conservatory in

OPPOSITE: Ornate flowerpots on handsome stone terraces at Bellingrath Gardens and Home near Mobile, Alabama, overflow with petite, prolific cascade chrysanthemums; here a charming ‘Gumdrop’ mum shares space with Diamond Frost euphorbia. TOP RIGHT: Flashy crotons—grown for their bright foliage—complement the bedding mums on the stone fountain terrace, as seen from a balcony of the Bellingrath home. ABOVE RIGHT: Chuck Owens is Bellingrath’s director of horticulture and chrysanthemum expert. RIGHT: On the Great Lawn, ‘Pink Fleece’ mums—here in a hanging basket—dominated the display in 2014, the 50th anniversary of Bellingrath’s first mum show.
Yellow cascade mums pour from bright red supports. More than 450 cascades of mums are in spectacular bloom throughout the garden from early October into November.
keeping with European traditions, installed fountains and terraces, and, in 1932, invited the citizens of Mobile out to behold the splendors of their garden. When the Bellingraths died, the estate and its 10,000-square-foot home became the property of a foundation charged by Walter Bellingrath with maintaining it "as a fitting and permanent memorial to my wife."

"She had turned his fishing camp—his buddy hangout—into a garden," says Chuck Owens, director of horticulture at Bellingrath Gardens. Owens and the garden's staff keep the grounds in bloom practically year-round, but fall is his favorite time in the garden. "To me, it's just prettier than spring," he says. "The variety in the gardens, the weather itself, and the changing of the seasons—it's just better."

Bessie Bellingrath didn't begin the annual mum display, but the scope and scale of the show carry on the tradition of graciousness and garden artistry she had established. She was inspired by grand gardens the couple visited on trips to Europe and throughout the United States, particularly on the Eastern seaboard. The chrysanthemum show is indeed an apt tribute to her sensibilities.

The garden is at its fullest when the mums are in bloom. The bright-yellow, red, pink, magenta, and creamy-white chrysanthemums blooms sparkle against backdrops of handsome trees and shrubs and in the company of late-summer flowers, which continue to bloom into the fall in the mild southern climate.

Visitors always want to know how the staff at Bellingrath Gardens trains the mums and brings them into bloom as if on cue. "Then they want to know, 'Can I do this at home?'" Owens says. "You can do it, but my number 1 recommendation is, save yourself the trouble, and just come look at ours."

**TOP LEFT:** Balconies and bridges all around the garden are draped with cascade mums meticulously trained into a graceful trailing habit. Tiny flowers by the thousands almost obscure the leaves. Here a display of three different cascade mums—"Snowfall," "Semtex," and "Yellow Daphne"—cover the balustrades of a bridge at the entrance to the rose garden. Just beyond the bridge is the three-tiered fountain in the rose garden. The mums are grown in a nursery area on the grounds of Bellingrath and are moved into their spots in the garden in October. **ABOVE LEFT:** Almost two dozen enormous spheres are planted with rooted cuttings. The blooming balls of mums (this is "Yellow Daphne") are held high on slender poles. **LEFT:** The Bellingrath home's balconies overlook terraces and courtyards. Bright red and yellow cascade mums glow against the handsome brickwork.
Plant at a Glance

Chrysanthemums

Fall-blooming mums are beloved for their rich colors and long-lasting show. They are members of the daisy family, native to Japan and China, with more than 200 species and many different forms. The mums grown for the fall show at Bellingrath Gardens and Home are cascade mums, which have flowers smaller than 2 inches across. When they bloom, the flowers completely cover the plants. Chrysanthemums are well-adapted to intensive pruning and staking.

Botanical name: Chrysanthemum morifolium (syn. Dendranthema × grandiflorum)

Hardiness: Many mums are excellent perennial garden plants, hardy in Zones 5-9. To keep garden mums healthy and productive, divide the plants every few years.

Bloom time: Mums bloom in summer and fall. Most gardeners pinch or prune their plants to encourage branching (and more flowers) and to delay the bloom time. At Bellingrath Gardens, the cascade mums are kept carefully sheared until the end of August. Eight weeks later, they burst into bloom.

Conditions: Plant mums in bright sun and well-drained soil. Even in hot, humid, Alabama summers, mums are grown in full sun. Fertilize about once a month during the growing season. Bellingrath gardeners use a 20-10-20 formulation to promote prolific bloom.

The inside story: This year, Bellingrath Gardens is celebrating the 51st anniversary of its annual mum display, billed as the largest outdoor chrysanthemum show in the United States. The garden’s original stock of chrysanthemums came from Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania, which holds an annual indoor mum festival every year. Today, Bellingrath grows about a dozen different cascade mums. The display changes from year to year, with different color schemes and fresh combinations.

For more information, see Resources on page 108.
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information about his workshops as well as his wife’s herbal medications. Visit groworganicanapples.com or herbandsapples.com.

Digging Dahlias
Pages 56–61
Elegant Effects, Inc.—P.O. Box 1021, Southport, CT 06890; 203/255-6216; eleganteffectsfloral.com; e-mail: mail@elkhflowers.com.

Dahlia sources include:
Swan Island Dahlias; 800/410-6540; dahlia.com.

In Praise of the Marigold
Pages 68–73
Marigold and Mint—1531 Melrose Ave., Seattle, WA 98112; 206/622-3111; marigoldandmint.com.

Made in the Shade
Pages 74–77
Terra Nova Nurseries—visit terranovanurseries.com to find retail and mail-order sources for many of the plants mentioned. Click on “Home Gardeners” on the home page.

Labor of Love
Pages 78–83
Sources for roses include:
Antique Rose Emporium; 800/441-0002; wearoroses.com.
Chamblee’s Rose Nursery; 800/556-7673; chambleeroses.com.
David Austin Roses; 800/328-8893; davidaustroroses.com.
Roses Unlimited; 804/682-7673; rosesunlimiteddownroot.com.

Sources for clematis include:
Bushwood Nursery; gardenvines.com.

Sources for hydrangeas include:

Monticello Historic Seeds are from: The Monticello Shop, 800/643-1543, monticelloshop.org.

Fall is for Foliage
Pages 44–49
Garden design—Marybeth Clandella, Garden Revival; 505/486-1947; gardenrevival.org; e-mail: gardenrevivalmarybeth@gmail.com.

Fresh & Crisp
Pages 50–55
Growers’ associations can help you find suitable varieties for your soil and region and give you advice on all aspects of growing. For more information, visit: North American Fruit Explorers, nafe.org; Holistic Orchard Network, groworganicanapples.com; or Backyard Fruit Growers, www.sas.upenn.edu/~dailybygd/hg.html.

For more from Michael Phillips, consider:
The Holistic Orchard: Tree Fruits and Berries the Biological Way by Michael Phillips; Chelsea Green; 2011, 422 pages. Phillips has also created two websites with

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