Cascading Mum Display

If you asked most visitors to associate Bellingrath Gardens with one season and one plant, the vast majority would say spring and Azaleas. During March and April, the Gardens are a riot of color in shades of pink, lavender and white. But the month of November certainly rivals spring with the floral displays of cascading chrysanthemums. Unlike spring where Mother Nature is responsible for the floral beauty that visitors admire, our horticultural staff works over ten months to create these fall displays.

Cascade chrysanthemums are used for the Gardens’ breathtaking November floral displays. Native to the Orient, this type of mum is used because of its vigorous growth rate and freely branching character. These two traits allow the plants to be trained into columns, hanging baskets and cascades. Over the years, considerable effort has been made by breeders to introduce new varieties varying in color and form. Flowers range in color from shades of yellow and bronze and red to softer shades of pink and white.

Unlike the typical garden mum which most gardeners use in late September and October, cascade chrysanthemums don’t come into their full glory until the month of November. For this reason, only those gardens in the Deep South can display these mums in outdoor settings. Other gardens like Longwood Gardens and New York Botanical Garden display their mums in heated conservatories.

During the summer months the greenhouse production staff produced 345 cascades, 135 columns and 35 hanging baskets in addition to over 3,330 garden mums. This operation is without question the most labor intensive crop at Bellingrath.

Regular Admission to Gardens: Adults $12.50, Children ages 5 -12 $7 and Children 4 years and younger as well as Friends of Bellingrath Members are free.

Available for additional interviews:
Dr. Bill Barrick, Executive Director – 251.973.2217 or barrick@bellingrath.org and Chuck Owens, BG&H Director of Horticulture – 251.973.2217 or cowens@bellingrath.org
Bellingrath Gardens and Home
Cascading Mum Production Video Link – YouTube.com

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUTcQbWrowk&feature=share&list=TL3rcbPekRlKTsO9erdXuow3iyAKo61e3m
Easy Autumn Favorites

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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...
keeping with European traditions, installed fountains and terraces, and, in 1933, 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 bloom 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. “They want to know, ‘Can I do this at home?’” Owens says. “You can do it, but my number one 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’s a display of three different cascade mums—“Snowfall,” “Seal,” 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; there are 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.
RESOURCES

Continued from page 108

information about his workshops as well as his wild's medicinal herbs. Visit groworganicapples.com or heritageapples.com.

Digging Dahlias
Pages 56–61
Elmgen Effecol, Inc.—P.O. Box 1039, Southport, CT 06890; 203/869-6653; megan@effecolfloral.com; e-mail: mail@ellflowers.com.
Dahlias sources include:
• Swan Island Dahlias; 800/440-5544; dahlia.com.

In Praise of the Marigold
Pages 68–73

Made in the Shade
Pages 74–77
Terra Nova Nurseries—visit terranovanursery.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:
• Antelope Rose Emporium; 800/440-0002; weareres.com.
• Champlain’s Rose Nursery; 800/729-7673; champlainross.com.
• David Austin Roses; 800/398-4893; davidaustrinares.com.
• Roses Unlimited; 804/482-7673; rosesunlimited.com.

Sources for dahlias include:
• Swan Island Dahlias; 800/440-5544; dahlia.com.

Cascade-style mums are available from:
King’s Mums; kingsmums.com. (The company sells rooted cuttings that are ready to transplant into 4-inch or larger pots.)

Backyard Forage Feast
Pages 98–103
For more from Ellen Zachos, consider:

Over the Garden Gate
Page 112
Jerry Fritz Garden Design, Inc.—Jerry@jerrysgardendesign.com.
Linden Hill Gardens—8350 Easton Rd., Ottsville, PA 18942; (mailing address: P.O. Box 10, Ottsville, PA 18942; 215/637-1020; lindenhillgardens.com; e-mail: info@lindenhillgardens.com.

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Longwood Gardens – Where America’s Mum Shows Began

Longwood Gardens, one of the great gardens of the world, is the living legacy of Pierre S. du Pont who purchased the property so he could preserve the trees. From 1907 until the 1930’s, he created most of what is enjoyed today. The Conservatory was built in 1919 and opened in 1921. It has been expanded and renovated over the years and currently consists of 195,668 square feet of covered display, production and research greenhouses. Design teams, gardeners and production staff create eight horticultural displays in the Conservatory throughout the year. One of the most spectacular is the Chrysanthemum Display.

Longwood’s first Chrysanthemum Display was in 1921. The first month-long Chrysanthemum Festival was held in 1981. Cascade chrysanthemums have long been at the heart of Longwood’s annual display. The cascades use a specialty mum (Chrysanthemum × morifolium) that originated in China and Japan and are selected for their ability to create beautiful forms.

Bellingrath Gardens and Home was fortunate to receive stock plants from Longwood Gardens to create our own Cascading chrysanthemums in the early 60’s. According to Plant Records at Longwood, the following cuttings were sent to Bellingrath in June 1962:

- 11 cuttings of Chrysanthemum × morifolium ‘Anna’—a yellow cascade single mum
- 16 cuttings of a white cascade chrysanthemum, without a cultivar name
- 2 cuttings of Chrysanthemum × morifolium ‘Louise Parker’, unknown classification
- 7 cuttings of Chrysanthemum × morifolium ‘Wine’, unknown classification

Other gardens that have received cuttings from Longwood Gardens include Brookside Gardens, Denver Botanic Gardens, The Botanic Garden of Smith College, Garfield Park Conservatory, Callaway Gardens and Norfolk Botanical Garden.

Today Longwood’s Chrysanthemum Festival features 20,000 blooming chrysanthemums throughout the Conservatory. They are displayed in cascades, obelisks, ball standards, 13-foot arches and single stems. The Thousand Bloom Chrysanthemum was incorporated into their show in 1995. In 2009, the Wonder of the Mum World chrysanthemum — a single plant with over 100 different cultivars of chrysanthemum blooming was added to the show.

While Longwood Garden’s Chrysanthemum Festival is perhaps the largest indoor display, our own display of cascading mums, columns, spheres and baskets is the largest outdoor display. A brilliant combination of horticulture and artistry!