

Mums Add A Splash Of Color To Dreary Fall Gardens

By Ginny Smith

THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

DOYLESTOWN, Pa. (AP) – Potted chrysanthemums, mums for short, are everywhere this time of year – perfect little domes that pop into place like autumn cupcakes.

If you're new to the joys of "the queen of fall flowers," you might be surprised to know that it truly does have a royal history, dating back to the 15th century B.C. in China. And that those supermarket pots, though blanketing the landscape, represent but a tiny fraction of the world of chrysanthemums.

"Whether we're talking about chrysanthemums or vegetables, breeders are breeding for a mass market," says Grace Romero, research director for W. Atlee Burpee & Co. at the company's Fordhook Farm in Doylestown.

Romero is noodling around with all sorts of new and different mums in her test garden, where she's searching for the chrysanthemum equivalent of a great-tasting winter tomato. She's looking for tougher, prettier, longer-lasting, stronger-stemmed and shapelier mum plants to breed and eventually sell to home gardeners as alternatives to the mass-produced ones.

"Even if it's a nice shape and even if the color is nice," Romero says of potted mums, "it's just not as interesting. And mums don't have to be bushy and dense."

In their defense, the populist mums of fall bring seasonal symmetry, comforting ritual, and a last bit of color before frost to patios, storefronts and fading flower beds. Often referred to in general terms such as garden, fall or hardy mums, they also have three qualities that quicken the pulse of gardener and non-gardener alike: They're no work, they're cheap, and they require no cleanup.

Despite the "hardy" label, most won't make it through the winter. They're usually treated as annuals – and, like poinsettias, get tossed when the season changes.

Something to be said for all that, and Jean and Ralph Parks of Media are happy to say it. These champion mum-growers – in that sense, true mummies – proudly display a 20-foot courtyard walkway they've framed with neat ribbons of homegrown, garden-variety mums in yellow, bronze and red.

They grew all 250 of them from cuttings, and on a recent nippy day the sunshine and breezes seemed to heighten their brightness – especially with the couple's white-brick house as background.

"The pots you get at the supermarket have raised awareness of mums. Everyone's got them now," says Jean Parks, who enjoys the orderliness of her courtyard design.

Even for the cognoscenti, then, mums are the go-to plants of autumn. "There's nothing else this time of year but asters," Parks says, "and they're pretty much done now."

The couple also cultivate a host of fussy exhibition- or florist-type cutting mums in a wood-frame shelter in the backyard, grooming them, pinching rambunctious stems to thicken the plant, and manipulating hours of sun and shade to ease them into dramatic bloom at just the right time for competitions.

They easily parse the 13 official classes of chrysanthemums, which are determined by flower form. Some names – spider, anemone, quill, spoon or pompon – are quite descriptive. Others, like incurve or reflex, have meanings only insiders could guess.

But one thing everyone appreciates about this huge plant group is how very different the different mums can be.

You'll find blooms in the shape of delicate daisies and tiny buttons, baby porcupines, bottle brushes and fireworks. Flowers range from less than a half-inch to eight inches wide, and plants can be low-growers or five feet tall.

The word chrysanthemum comes from the Greek chrysois, meaning golden, the original daisylike flower's color. Today, mums have been bred in shades of pink, purple, red, bronze, orange and white.

From its origins in China, the chrysanthemum was introduced into Japan in the eighth century, to Europe in the 17th, and to North America by a Hoboken, N.J., nurseryman named John Stevens in the late-18th.

Kiku, or chrysanthemum, remains the symbol of the Japanese royal family. In this country, it has no such associations. But it's still popular.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, mums are the third best-selling cut flower, after roses and carnations, and third in potted-plant sales, after poinsettias and orchids.

Burpee's Romero is out to expand the public's knowledge of mums, including the stunning salmon-pink, daisy look-alike called "Sheffield" or "Sheffield Pink."

She has planted a few inside the perennial garden at Fordhook Farm, but to tell the truth, they look a little lonely in there. Just outside the garden, though, is another story.

All along the wooden fence, she has fashioned a beautiful border of airy Sheffields. Romero swears she tossed a dozen plants in there two years ago and, other than mulch,

hasn't done a thing to them. They've spread like mad.

Unlike their wimpy relatives, they're tough. They can take a real winter. But we're not there yet. It's only a drizzly fall day in Doylestown.

Still, Romero's mums are a vision of pink, apricot and yellow blush. Like fresh-faced young ladies, they're dancing in the light rain and flirting with the purple butterfly bush behind the fence.

You realize they're distracting you from the dried-up brown stuff this garden, like yours, is filling up with.

Feds Again Reducing Counts Against Top Pathologist

By Joe Mandak

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

PITTSBURGH (AP) – Federal prosecutors in Pittsburgh are seeking to drop more than half the counts against celebrity pathologist Cyril Wecht before his retrial, saying it will make the case easier on the jury they hope will convict him.

Prosecutors say Wecht, the former Allegheny County coroner, used government staff and equipment to benefit his lucrative private practice. The forensic expert has used the practice to investigate famous deaths, including those of child beauty queen JonBenet Ramsey, Clinton White House deputy counsel Vince Foster and Elvis Presley.

Wecht was originally indicted on 84 theft- and fraud-related counts.

Prosecutors dismissed 43 of the counts to "streamline" the complicated case before the first trial. Jurors heard seven weeks of testimony and then deliberated for more than 50 hours over 11 days, but they could not agree on a verdict and a mistrial was declared in April.

U.S. District Judge Sean McLaughlin had planned to set a new trial date Friday but decided not to because he expects pretrial arguments to delay the second trial. At the hearing, prosecutors revealed that they would again reduce the number of counts.

McLaughlin is expected to grant the motion to dismiss 27 counts of theft of honest services because Wecht's defense team doesn't object. That would leave Wecht facing 14 counts.

"They've dropped 70 felony charges against this man that we've had to defend against for two years," said Wecht's attorney, Jerry McDevitt. "I don't get the sense that anybody (in the public) wants this man put through this ordeal again."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Leo Dillon said that dismissing the charges will further simplify the case for the jury, but that the underlying allegations against Wecht will remain the same.

Prosecutors also said Friday that they want the trial moved 120 miles away to Erie because of intense local media coverage.

Assistant U.S. Attorney James Wilson told McLaughlin that moving the trial is necessary because of the "absolute saturation of the media coverage" the case has received in Pittsburgh. He said he doesn't believe an unbiased jury can be found in the area.

McDevitt opposes the move, calling it "peculiar." He said it's unfair to ask Wecht to pay for himself and his defense team to travel to Erie, especially since the purpose of the prosecution is to protect citizens in Allegheny County from misuse of government resources.

Prosecutors contend that Wecht used deputy coroners, secretaries and lab workers to run errands and do work on private cases, and that he sent bills and other correspondence to his private clients using the county's fax machine.

5 Students Hurt When Bus Overtakes In Central Pa.

YORK, Pa. (AP) – Five elementary students are recovering from minor injuries after their school bus crashed and flipped over in central Pennsylvania.

Police say the Dover Area School District bus went off the road after a curve, hit an embankment and flipped over Friday morning.

The driver and 25 students escaped through an emergency exit door.

Five students were taken to York Hospital with minor injuries.

Pa. Man Guilty In Girlfriend's Arson Death

LANCASTER, Pa. (AP) – A central Pennsylvania man who doused his girlfriend with gasoline and set her on fire two years ago is guilty of first-degree murder.

A sentence of life without parole is mandatory for 40-year-old John Wayne Graves Jr. of Lancaster. Graves was convicted Friday in a nonjury trial. The judge delayed formal sentencing for a week so the victim's relatives could have time to prepare statements to read at his sentencing.

The victim, 29-year-old Angela Readance, died at a hospital eight days after the 2006 fire.

A police detective testified that Graves blamed Readance, saying she poured the gasoline and lit it in a murder-suicide attempt. But a medic testified that Readance told her that Graves did it.

PA Man Charged With Raping 11-Year-Old

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. (AP) – A central Pennsylvania man is charged with raping and assaulting an 11-year-old girl more than 150 times over 19 months.

Court papers say the child told police that 41-year-old Joe Aleman repeatedly raped her since she was 10 and that the assaults happened up to three times a week.

The State College resident was arrested Thursday night and is charged with 912 counts. They include 152 counts each of felony rape, felony involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, and felony aggravated indecent assault.

He is also charged with 152 counts each of indecent assault, indecent exposure and corruption of minors.

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