

Chrysanthemum, mum, tansy

Botanical Names: *Chrysanthemum*, *Dendranthema*

Family: *Asteraceae*

The name chrysanthemum comes from the Greek *chrys* (golden) and *anthos* (flower.) Though it was first noted in China and then Japan, the Mediterranean *Chrysanthemum coronarium*, from the Latin *coronaries* was used for garlands that were made to protect against demons. Another name for the mum was *Dios ophrya* (God's eyebrow.) The European feverfew or featherfew (the medieval *Tanacetum*, or "tansie," now *Chrysanthemum parthenium*) was widely used as an antipyretic. Some flowers that we call daisy, such as the ox-eye daisy, the painted daisy and the Shasta daisy are technically chrysanthemums.



For twenty-five hundred years the Chinese chrysanthemum, originally a daisy-like wild plant, had been cultivated. The fourth-century poet T'ao Yuan-Ming had a famous chrysanthemum garden where he retired after government service. He preferred to "pick chrysanthemums from the hedges," entertain and get drunk to his former occupation. Thus Chrysanthemums came to symbolize a scholar in retirement, but not necessarily a recluse. Wine could be made from the infusions of petals and leaves while collecting the dew from these plants was to have given the collector a longer life. The Chinese considered the chrysanthemum, bamboo, plum and orchid the four "noble plants." In about 400 A.D. Zen Buddhist monks took chrysanthemums to Japan. Here they eventually became the symbol of the Mikado that was represented by an insignia that looked like the rising Sun but was in fact a sixteen-petaled chrysanthemum.



The first garden chrysanthemum, (*C.X morifolium*), in Europe came to England in 1795. In the nineteenth century, John Reeves, tea inspector for the East India Tea Company in China, sent home chrysanthemums and botanical drawings by Chinese artists. Shortly thereafter Robert Fortune sent home the Chusan daisy, which became the pompom chrysanthemum, so called in France, because it looked like the pompoms on the French sailors' hats.

Chrysanthemums are short-day flowers that bloom in the autumn. When grown in greenhouses, they can be fooled into blooming any time of year by decreasing the amount of light they receive. One ardent chrysanthemum grower is said to have sued his township because a streetlight shining on the flowers kept them from blooming. Mums are used freely in gardens in England and America but in Italy, perhaps because of the time of year they bloom, they are associated with the dead and are unacceptable in any other context.

100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names
by Diana Wells