

Mari Mums the New Queen of The Fall Garden Texas Superstar

Old Man Summer can hammer most of the earlier planted annuals to a frazzle. Is there a shining knight that can rescue you from these doldrums? You bet there is and it's called a mari-mum.

The name mari-mum is derived from a combination of the terms marigold and chrysanthemum and denotes large-flowered American marigolds that possess a similar flower form and are used as a fall crop like chrysanthemums. The marigolds that best fit this concept are hybrids characterized by earlier blooming, larger flowers and high levels of uniformity.



Several years of testing by Texas A&M AgriLIFE horticulturists in both south and north central Texas have revealed many desirable attributes exhibited by mari-mums. For example, they:

- Are very low maintenance for a flowering annual
- Are extremely easy to grow (almost foolproof when planted in a well-drained soil in full sun)
- Produce more blossoms and retain better blossom color as a fall crop
- Possess tremendous visual impact, even at a distance.

When compared to fall-planted chrysanthemums, mari-mums:

- Will bloom 2-3 times longer
- Their open blossoms are more resistant to wind and rain
- Are less expensive to produce which gives you more bang for your gardening buck

Spider Mites Not A Problem!

At this point many of you are thinking how beautiful mari-mums will be as a fall crop but you're worried that spider mites, the archenemy of marigolds, will make their ugly presence known.

Spider mites love hot weather but their rate of reproduction is greatly reduced by cool fall temperatures. By first removing any mite-infested plants from the flowerbed and then planting fresh mari-mums transplants in mid August, you can avoid significant mite injury, all without the use of pesticides

Recommended Cultivars

The super mari-mum cultivars currently recommended are 'Discovery Yellow' and 'Discovery Orange', dwarf plants 8-10 inches in height, and 'Voyager Yellow', a somewhat larger cultivar at 14-16 inches in height.

Mari-Mum Culture At A Glance

- Transplant in mid August for the longest period of spectacular bloom. Purchase transplants with foliage only or in bud, but not in full bloom. Transplants in full bloom at planting devote all of their energy to supporting that tremendous bloom load and thus have little energy left for proper establishment and growth.
- Plant in full sun (i.e. at least 8-10 hours per day).
- Must have good soil drainage. To achieve this, incorporate 4-6 inches of organic material (compost, hay, straw, peat moss, etc.) and plant on raised beds.
- Fertilizer requirements: While tilling in the organic material, also incorporate fertilizer based on results of a soil test. If test results are not available, apply 1-2 pounds of a slow-release lawn fertilizer (many of which contain sulfur-coated urea) per 100 sq. ft. of bed area.
- Space transplants of 'Discovery Yellow' and 'Discovery Orange' 8 inches apart, 'Voyager Yellow' 12 inches apart. Mulch entire bed after planting to reduce water consumption and weed competition.
- Water in thoroughly at planting. For the first week after planting, new transplants may need to be watered almost daily. Thereafter, water only when top inch of soil is dry (check with your finger every 5-7 days). Established mari-mums can be killed by watering too frequently. For example, every other day for established plants is too often!

Landscape Uses

- Mari-mums have such visual impact, even at a distance, that they're a wonderful choice for mass planting in the accent corner of the backyard. Such a planting along the front edge of a bed, backed by a mass of evergreen or deciduous shrubs, is truly striking.
- 'Discovery Yellow' and 'Discovery Orange', with their small size and neat, compact growth habit, are perfect for edging walkways and garden paths.
- Mari-mums do extremely well in containers. Ensure adequate number of drain holes, fill with loose, open potting mix, then add slow-release fertilizer. Place container in full sun. Water weekly with a water-soluble houseplant fertilizer. Then sit back and get ready to enjoy the beauty, drama and excitement that truly outstanding fall annuals can provide!