

Aster Cultural Information

Asters are the perfect companion for garden mums. Like garden mums, they can be used in summer, fall and West Coast programs. They also have similar cultural requirements.

Asters are trialed with the same media and fertilizer as garden mums. Fall and West Coast asters are grown with no pinch, just like garden mums. There are a few differences from garden mum culture, which are highlighted below.

Propagation

Aster cuttings are not as tough as garden mums. Stick unrooted cuttings as soon as they arrive. Propagation may take a few days longer than mums. Keeping the media too wet will delay rooting.

Growing Media and Fertilization

The same soilless media and the same 300-400 ppm nitrogen constant liquid feed program from a complete fertilizer used for garden mums will work for asters (see Growing Media and Fertilization sections in Garden Mum Cultural Information). Maximum growth is attained when water and fertilizer are not limited, similar to garden mums. Asters are more sensitive to salts in the root zone. Be sure solution comes out of the pot at every irrigation. If you notice foliage tip burn, you may need to leach. Monitor the pot EC to prevent damage. Target should be approximately 75% of the garden mum target.

Flowering Response

Asters flower under short days, and tend to bud easier than garden mums. Be sure to use night interruption lighting year round for propagation, as well as the long day period for forced crops (see the Photoperiod Control section in Garden Mum Cultural Information). Asters flower faster than mums once short days begin. Most flower in five weeks, compared to seven for mums. Avoid blackout periods longer than 13 hours since some varieties can abort flower buds. Artificial short days should be used from March 15 to August 15. We recommend retailing asters earlier than mums, when color is just starting to show, for better consumer longevity.

In natural season programs, asters flower faster under hot and bright conditions. Asters grown in the South flower seven to 10 days faster than the same variety grown in the North.

Pinching

Traditionally, fall aster crops have been pinched at least once and black cloth flowering crops received two pinches. With the availability of new, better-branching varieties, aster pinch requirements have been reduced. For trials, multiple cuttings are now used, with just one pinch for black cloth, and one cutting with no pinch for natural season.

For black cloth crops, the pinch should be given when roots are well developed. This is generally 10 to 14 days after planting a rooted cutting or 21-24 days after a direct stick. Pinch off the top to leave four to six leaves on the cuttings. Rooted cuttings naturally become taller during propagation than cuttings that are direct stuck. The first pinch on rooted cuttings will be harder than for direct-stick unrooted cuttings.

If you pinch more than once, allow enough growth for three to four leaves to remain after pinching. Pinching can be done every two to three weeks. Be sure to pinch all shoots or there will be uneven growth and flowering.

Pinching is not required on natural season crops. Pinching natural season crops after mid-July is not recommended as the plants are too close to bud initiation.

Spacing

As with garden mums, proper spacing is critical. Asters are generally smaller in size than garden mums and therefore can be grown tighter.

Height Control

With today's free-branching varieties, less growth regulators are needed to control height. B-Nine and Bonzi are used successfully and rates are similar to those for garden mums (see Growth Regulator section in Garden Mum Cultural Information).

Insect Control

Whiteflies and thrips and occasional spider mites are the key insect pests.

Disease Control

Asters are susceptible to some different diseases than garden mums, primarily powdery mildew and rust. Some varieties are more resistant to disease than others, but disease expression is also weather dependent and varies from year to year. These diseases generally do not spread to an adjacent garden mum crop. Good cultural practices that create an unsuitable environment for the disease reduces their incidence.

For outdoor aster production, we strongly recommend a preventative spray program with a myclobutanil chemical such as Eagle or Hoist to control rust and powdery mildew. Scout crops regularly and apply protective fungicides as needed. Try to limit the number of spray applied as they can have a growth retardant effect.

Before using any pesticides, be sure that they are registered for use in your state. Check with your local county extension agent or state university extension service. See label for use rates and application methods. Always follow label directions. The label is the law.



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