

Chrysanthemum History



Aris' Contribution

While beautiful chrysanthemums trace their ancestry to the ancient Chinese and Japanese empires of centuries ago, it has only been within the last half of the 20th century that pot mums evolved as the most popular of all year-round flowering plants.

That evolution has been inextricably linked to Aris Horticulture, Inc. (formerly Yoder Brothers Inc.) and the pioneering research done by its plant pathologists and breeders to develop healthier, longer-lasting plants in a greater variety of flower forms and colors than ever before available in chrysanthemums.

The turning point came in the 1930s and 1940s when the scientific world discovered that fall-blooming chrysanthemums could be made to flower year-round by manipulating daylight hours. By shortening daylight hours to simulate the coming of fall, chrysanthemums can be made to flower just as they do in nature at that time of year.

Using this new technology, Aris (then Yoder Brothers) soon began to grow chrysanthemums year round and revolutionized mum production. Under the direction of Harold Yoder, William Duffett, Cloy Miller, Conrad Olson and Herbert Johnson, Aris put together the first successful year-round commercial cutting business that is now the basis for how all cuttings are produced.

None of this could have happened, however, if Aris had not first come up with a way to stop Verticillium wilt and, later, chrysanthemum stunt, diseases that threatened the chrysanthemums with extinction in the years just before and after World War II.

Johnson and Olson initiated a culture-indexing program to control Verticillium wilt, a feat never before accomplished outside of the laboratory. Olson then went on to complete the development of a modern culture indexing and certification system that has become the basis for all other commercial propagators' clean-stock programs.

Aris' breeding efforts lead to the development of healthier, fuller plants with more blooms. Flower keeping quality was improved and new varieties are now flowering in a shorter time than older ones. New colors and flower forms are much sought after to provide excitement in the marketplace, such as Pelee with the first bicolor flowers seen in pot mums. In 2008, Yoder garden and pot mums were sold to Syngenta, which continues the breeding excellence benchmarked by Aris.

Early History

New varieties from scant resemblance to the original golden daisies of the Orient which legend says were washed ashore on an island in the Japanese archipelago centuries ago. The flowers, China's most valuable possession, were carried by 12 maidens and 12 boys who were to trade the mums for the herb of youth to save their revered emperor.

Finding the island uninhabited, the travelers settled down to build an empire and plant the mums. As legends often contain elements of truth, the story puts the birthplace of mums in China and explains the tradition where mums for centuries were the exclusive possession of the Japanese emperor.

Even today, when the Japanese say "kiku" - or chrysanthemum - they are as likely to be referring to the imperial crest of their emperor as to the flower. The royal symbol, with its traditional chrysanthemum design, and the flower have long been synonymous. Annual chrysanthemum festivals are celebrated in communities throughout Japan each fall much on the scale of the Oktoberfest in Germany and other harvest festivals.

History indicates that the first chrysanthemums to reach Europe were probably introduced by Dutch explorers during the 18th century. While records show that a half-dozen mum varieties were grown in Holland during this period, it was the agriculturally minded French Huguenots who imported a variety of forms from the Dutch and developed Old Purple, one of the basic mums of European gardens.

Other French gardeners, improving on the Chusan daisy brought to Europe by Robert Fortune, one of England's great plant hunters, named their flower form a pompon because it reminded them of the wool pompons on their soldiers' hats. Pompons remain a popular chrysanthemum flower form today.

The Old Purple chrysanthemum was introduced to the Americas in 1798 by John Stevens, a Hoboken, N.J., nurseryman. The Chusan daisy was well established by 1850 and the Chrysanthemum Society of America was founded and held its first exhibit in 1902.



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