



The National Chrysanthemum Society[®]

Chrysanthemums A Beginners Guide

Cultivated for over 2,500 years, chrysanthemums originated in China and spread to Europe, admired for their resilience, vibrant colours, and late-season blooms. These versatile flowers come in various shapes and sizes, thrive in diverse conditions, and make excellent long lasting cut flowers. Easy to grow and rewarding, they are a perfect choice for any gardener and flower lover. Here's everything you need to know about growing them.



Choosing cultivars to grow

Chrysanthemums naturally flower from August to December and flowering times fall into three categories: **Early (Outdoors in August – September), Late (Indoors in November – December), and October-flowering**. With hundreds of cultivars available, there's a perfect chrysanthemum for every garden. For beginners, early-flowering sprays or blooms are ideal, as they flower outdoors from late August to the end of September. To ensure the best quality plants, purchase rooted cuttings from a specialist nursery or local chrysanthemum society plant sale. Order early, as nurseries typically require 4 – 5 weeks to root cuttings and prepare your order.

The timing of when you receive your plants depends on your growing facilities:

- **Heated greenhouse:** February onwards
- **Cold greenhouse:** Mid-March
- **Cold frame:** Mid-April

Upon receiving your rooted cuttings, pot them into **9cm pots** or plant them in seed trays with **John Innes No. 1 compost** or a good quality multi-purpose compost. Water lightly and leave several days before watering again, this will allow the roots to establish into the fresh compost. Grow the plants on in a bright, frost-free greenhouse. In early April the plants can be potted on into 13 cm pots (using the same compost as before) before moving them into the cold frame. Start ventilating gradually to harden the plants off for planting out from mid May onwards.

Pinching or Stopping

Pinching, or stopping, involves **removing 1cm –1.5cm of the growing tip** to encourage the development of side shoots and multiple flowering stems. This should be done between **early April and early June**, depending on the cultivar and your location. Nursery catalogues often provide recommended stopping dates, but a little trial and error will help you perfect the timing for your garden.

Preparing the Soil

Chrysanthemums will grow in most soils, but like most herbaceous plants will do best on an open site in full sun, in well-drained, fertile soil. Preparing the growing area should begin in late Autumn – early Winter, by improving the soil with bulky organic matter, garden compost or well rotted manure. By mid April the final preparation of the planting area should be accomplished, giving a base dressing of a well-balanced general fertiliser and raked in.

Planting Out

Planting takes place in **May**, after the last frost. Harden off plants before planting, spacing them **45cm apart in rows with 45cm between rows** to ensure they receive adequate light, water, and nutrients. **Support is essential**, as many cultivars grow between **1m and 1.5m tall**. Use **bamboo canes** or stretch 15cm square **pea and bean netting** between sturdy posts to prevent flopping.



Seasonal Care

- **Side Shoot removal:** Remove excess side shoots, leaving **2-5 per plant**, these will develop into strong flowering stems.
- **Tying and Staking:** Regularly tie plants to their supports to protect them from wind damage.
- **Watering:** Once established, water during dry spells.
- **Feeding:** Apply a balanced fertilizer, such as **Growmore**, in mid-June.
- **Disbudding for Larger Blooms:** For **disbud chrysanthemums**, remove side buds to allow a single large bloom per stem. **Spray chrysanthemums** naturally develop multiple blooms per stem, requiring no disbudding.
- **Feeding:** Once buds appear in **July**, apply a half strength balanced liquid feed every **seven days** until the buds show colour. Keep plants well-watered to support flower development during dry weather.

Cutting and Arranging

One of the biggest reasons to grow chrysanthemums is their suitability as cut flowers and their **exceptional vase life**. Their sturdy stems and firm petals make them long-lasting cut flowers. For best results:

- **Cut flowers early in the morning or evening to avoid hot sunny weather**, when stems are well-hydrated.
- **Immediately place them in clean water** and remove any leaves below the waterline to prevent bacterial growth.
- **Change the water every few days** and trim stems slightly to prolong freshness.

Overwintering and Stock Selection

At the end of the flowering season, **cut back plants to 30cm**. Select only the healthiest plants for overwintering, discard any plants that show signs of disease or weak growth. Lift the root-balls (footstools) from the soil, trim the roots, and plant them in seed trays with **moist compost**. Store in a **frost-free greenhouse, garage, or shed**, ensuring they don't dry out completely.



Propagating Your Own Plants

The best way to grow chrysanthemums is from **cuttings** taken from your own overwintered stools, cuttings can be taken in February or March.

1. **Four to six weeks before taking cuttings**, bring stools into a warm greenhouse (8-10°C) and water lightly, this will bring them into growth.
2. **When new basal shoots reach 4-5cm**, take cuttings by snapping off the shoots and removing lower leaves.
3. Insert cuttings into **moist compost trays with bottom heat (15-18°C)** for rapid rooting.
4. After **2-3 weeks the cuttings will be rooted**, these can be potted into 9cm pots.



THE NCS SINCERELY THANKS NEIL COOPER FOR COMPILING THIS GUIDE

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