GROWING LARGE DISBUD CHRYSANTHEMUM BLOOMS
by Rita Rover

This article is for those who would like to grow large-flowered chrysanthemums. By disbudding and limiting to a maximum of 3 blooms per plant, allows all the plant’s energy to be channeled into producing large blooms. Some examples can be found in the classes described as irregular incurve, reflex, quills, and spiders. By following these instructions, it’s possible, for example, to grow spider mums at least 15 inches in diameter.

In addition to the recommendations below, we suggest seeking out a local National Chrysanthemum Society chapter for more detailed advice and growing tips. (See www.mums.org for complete listings.) Also, for those interested in exhibiting blooms in chrysanthemum shows, either through local chapters of the National Chrysanthemum Society or at the national level, the following steps describe how to produce blue ribbon blooms.

Note: These instructions are intended for growing cultivars up to size A as listed at ncs-mums.org/us/list-of-headings-titles/. For the larger size AA blooms from the UK, see the article titled, “The British are Coming! Growing UK Disbuds – Large Exhibition Varieties” in the March 2017 issue of The Chrysanthemum magazine and, “Chrysanthemums: The ultimate ebook” available at www.ivormace.com

GROWING INSTRUCTIONS

Medium: Pro-Mix BX (with mycorrhizae if possible), available at garden centers. Do not use a potting mix with moisture control beads.

Cuttings: Start rooted cuttings in a 3-4-inch pot. Water in using a water-soluble fertilizer such as Miracle Gro at one-half strength and place in partial shade for a few days. Gradually acclimate the potted cuttings to full sun over several days. After a few weeks, when the roots have filled the 4 inch pots they are ready to be transplanted to a pot or bed.

Growing in a pot: From the 4-inch pot transplant to a 6-inch pot and later to a final 10-12 inch pot or larger. In the final pot, place a tablespoon of slow release Osmocote below the roots. Plastic pots with straight sides and holes at the bottom work best. Do not put a saucer under the pot as it must drain freely.

Growing in a bed - Bed Preparation: The bed should have a width of 3 feet allowing you to reach in from either side and have access to both sides of all plants. Chrysanthemums require at least 6 hours of full sun per day. Two weeks before planting, for every 100 square feet of bed area, add 2 ½ cups of ground limestone (preferably dolomitic), 3 cups 5-10-5 or 10-10-10 granular fertilizer, and 3 cups super phosphate. Then cover the entire bed with 2-3 inches of peat moss. The bed is then turned over well or rototilled to at least 10 inches deep. Water in well. Mums prefer a pH of 6.0-6.5.

Planting the bed: From the 4-inch pots, transplant to the bed. To keep down weeds, cover the bed with black plastic weedcloth. Ensure it is permeable to water. Cut a large X in the weedcloth
for each plant, sprinkle 1 tablespoon of slow release Osmocote into the hole and insert the plant no deeper than it had been growing in the pot.

It is best to plant 2 rows of plants 12” - 18” apart. Water with water soluble fertilizer at full strength, 1 tablespoon/gallon water. Use a high nitrogen fertilizer during the period of vegetative growth but change to a 20-20-20 formula (as in some tomato fertilizers) later in the summer during the flower-bud set period. Continue feeding every 7-10 days. Do not feed when the plant is wilted and avoid wetting the leaves after 4 pm to prevent mold. Monitor the plants for any insect damage or the start of any fungal diseases and deal with these if they appear.

**Pinching:** Around July 4th pinch out the terminal bud to encourage branching. If the stem is over 10 inches long, cut it down to about 4-6 inches, being sure to keep at least 6 leaves below the cut. As the plant sends out branches select 3 healthy stems, preferably the topmost, and remove the rest. Continue to remove all side branches, both on the 3 main stems and any basal growth. As the stems grow, insert 3 stakes and using twist ties, attach the stem to the stake every 4-6 inches. If growing in a pot insert stakes near the edge of the pot and rotate the pot a bit every week in order to keep the stems straight.

**Blooming:** Longer nights in the fall trigger chrysanthemums to start to produce flower buds. Plants must be protected from any nighttime light that will interrupt the period of darkness. Streetlights, porch lights, lights from passing cars may inhibit the production of flower buds.

**Timing blooms:** To produce a bloom in time for a show, the plant must be shaded. Expose the plant to at least 12 hours of complete darkness per day during this period. To accomplish this, move pots into a dark garage each night or build a light-weight frame over the bed and cover the frame with black cloth or black plastic. Remove the black cover each morning before any heat build-up.

Each chrysanthemum cultivar (variety in lay terms) takes a certain number of weeks to produce a bloom. Some take 8 weeks, others 9, 10 or 11 weeks. This is known as the response group for the cultivar which is then referred to as “an 8 weeker” or “9 weeker,” etc. The range of bloom dates for many cultivars is listed on www.kingsmums.com.

For example, the bloom date for Goldfield is listed in the catalog at www.kingsmums.com as October 8 to October 25. Therefore, it is a 10 weeker. (See chart below.) For a show on October 19 count back the number of weeks from the show date to calculate when to start shading. Then add about 3 days for insurance. Thus, shading should be started on 8/7 for a show on October 19.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># weeks</th>
<th>bloom date range</th>
<th>start shading for a show on October 19</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>9/5-9/18</td>
<td>8/21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>9/19-10/10</td>
<td>8/14</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>10/11-10/25</td>
<td>8/7</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>10/28-11/10</td>
<td>7/31</td>
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Stop shading once the nights are longer than 12 hours.
Flowering: Late August or early September look for a single flower bud or a cluster of flower buds forming at the tip of each stem. If there is more than one bud, when the buds are the size of a pea, gently roll out all but the central bud or, if that is damaged, the next best bud. Continue to remove all lower side branches and any buds lower down on the stem. This disbudding will produce a plant with 3 buds, with 1 bud per stem. Stop feeding when the buds show color and enjoy watching your beautiful blooms develop.

Protecting the bloom: At this stage rain and wind can damage the bloom. A frame covered with clear plastic should be placed over the bed as soon as the buds show color.