



Chrysanthemum—the quintessential fall flower

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Call it a *Chrysanthemum x morifolium*, or a *Dendranthema x grandiflora*, nothing says fall to me better than the bright yellow, russet, orange, gold and burgundy petals of the chrysanthemum. Whether you put one on your front step or you sink ten or twenty in your flower beds, these flowers are always a pretty way to welcome autumn. And why are these flowers so evocative of autumn? Well, aside from their fall-like color palette, these flowers are horticulturally termed short day/long night plants as they require a minimum of fourteen hours of darkness for eight weeks to initiate the production of flowers. And autumn is when we begin to experience shorter days and longer nights. So you may then wonder how it is that we can enjoy these flowers well before the days shorten that much.

Professional growers know the light and darkness requirements of the mum, and they can successfully control the light and darkness at any time of the year through artificial means to force the flowering process. When the days are naturally longer than the plant requires for flowering, (March 15 through September 15) the grower will simply cover the plants with black-out cloth from approximately 4 PM to 8 AM to artificially create an 8 hour day and a 16 hour night. So, if we are getting flowering plants in September for our fall flower beds, then we know the grower had a hand in the flowering process. (Incidentally, this is a shorter day than ever occurs naturally on Long Island.) If the flowers are desired when the day lengths/night lengths are appropriate, no such screening is necessary. Basically, the reverse holds true for plants that are long day/ short night flowering, and the grower must then provide artificial light if the days are too short for the flowering of the desired plant.