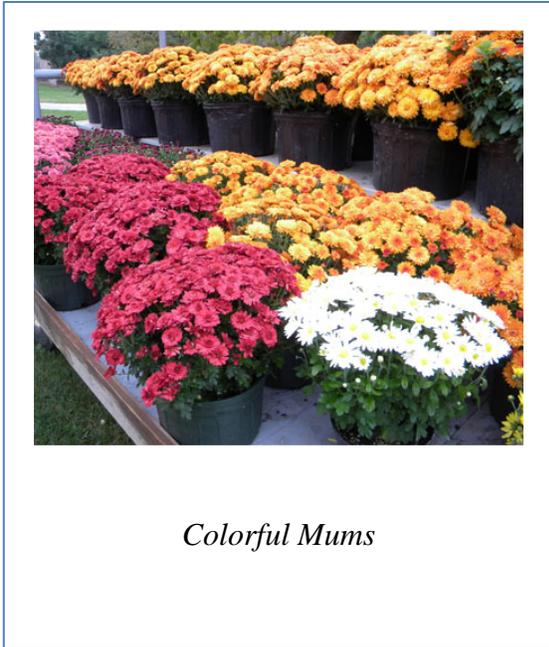


## Bringing plants in



Over the next few months, even people who do not have much in the line of a “green thumb” will start buying or receiving plants. Brightly colored mums in foil-wrapped pots can be the perfect host gift, and those of us who prefer not to use cut flowers will often try something different, like a potted orchid, for a dining table centerpiece. Even plants with dramatic or different kinds of leaves become presents. From about the end of September, right on through the New Year, people give and get more houseplants than they do during the other nine months.

These plants generally fall into one of three categories. Some of them will last no longer than a bouquet of cut flowers would. Others, however, can be maintained indoors, relying for the most part on window light. Some others can actually be planted outside in the garden, and will survive for

at least a few years as long as they receive a small amount of care.

The plants that do not last long are usually those that produce lovely shows of blossoms. It can be easy to feel like the most incompetent gardener when these (almost invariably) die. While it is always sad to lose a plant, that kind of self-criticism is not necessarily called for. In order to create the glorious show of blooms, the plants may have experienced such forcing that they are “used up.” They were exhausted, pushed to grow so fast, and produce so many flowers, that they become more tender than a normal, healthy plant would be. Enjoy these living bouquets while they last.

Many houseplants evolved in areas where the climate is usually warm and moist – tropical rain forests. If they have not been forced to grow excessively, they can survive indoors. In order to include them into the interior garden, however, it is critical to examine them carefully. First, shake the plant gently (not in front of the person who gave it, of course.) No flying creatures should appear. Then, examine the leaves for limpness, discoloration or holes, which could indicate disease. There must be no insects, nor little masses of something cottony adhering to the undersides or the juncture of leaf and stem. Finally, dig around a bit in the soil. Again, there should be no appearance of “critters”. If any of these problems should be present, the gardener has the choice of treating with one of the many pesticides available, or washing the plant thoroughly with a mixture cool water, dishwashing liquid and alcohol, or discarding the plant. If the plant is one of the hardy mums or some of the cacti, it might be just the thing to place in the garden. It should first be examined as rigorously as one that would be kept indoors, but then can be planted in amended soil, like any other addition to the landscape. With the numbers of plants that will be given or received over the coming fall, why not look at them as garden additions, either indoors or out?

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