

## Plant of the Week

# *Chrysanthemum*



Mother's Day is celebrated in Australia on the second Sunday in May. For most of the early years of the last century, it was seen as a day on which "Mum" had a day off work, to be thoroughly spoiled by husband and children. Breakfast in bed was usually followed by attendance at church, with all wearing white flowers, often *Gardenias*.

Later, *Chrysanthemums* became a popular Mother's Day gift. Sellers of *Chrysanthemum* flowers, known as the "bucket brigade", could be found on every street corner and every lay by for miles around Sydney. The current concept that an expensive gift must be bought for mother on Mother's Day has evolved in relatively recent years, a devious marketing ploy to which most of us have succumbed!

Prior to the establishment of Macquarie University, the land which is now campus, was farmed by (mostly) Italian market gardeners. In addition to fruit, and vegetables, they grew flowers, including *Chrysanthemums* for the Sydney flower market. Later, on the site now occupied by MGSM, groundsman David Melville grew flowers, including *Chrysanthemums*, for university administrative offices and library.





**Yellow Chrysanthemum - Chinancient.com.**

The *Chrysanthemum* (菊花) <sup>jú huā</sup> has great significance in Chinese culture where it is known, together with orchid, bamboo and plum blossom, as one of the “Four Gentlemen” 四君子 (Si Jun Zi)<sup>2</sup>. *Chrysanthemum* is first recorded in Chinese literature in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BC when the yellow flowers were used in Chinese traditional medicine. Drinking *Chrysanthemum* tea was seen to promote longevity, perhaps even immortality. The *Chrysanthemum* is also considered to symbolise the Confucian scholar. The

*Chrysanthemum* is able to withstand the rigours of the winter months; the scholar able to withstand the pressure to remain firm in his convictions<sup>1</sup>.

Up until the 8<sup>th</sup> century when white flowers were first recorded, only yellow *Chrysanthemums* were known. In 385 AD, *Chrysanthemums* reached Japan, but they took a long time to reach Europe, the first record appears in 1688 from Holland. Later in 1764, a *Chrysanthemum* was recorded in the Chelsea Physic Garden in London<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Peter Valder 1999 *The Garden Plants of China*. Florilegium, Balmain, Australia.

<sup>2</sup> Chinancient.com



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**The “Four Gentlemen” – Chrysanthemum, Bamboo, Orchid and Plum Blossom – Chinancient.com**