



William T. Kemper Center for Home Gardening

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Daylilies

Daylilies are members of the lily family (Liliaceae) and get their common name from the translation of the scientific name, *Hemerocallis*, that literally mean “beauty for a day”. A unique characteristic about daylilies is that the individual flowers are generally only open for one day. However, while each blossom is short-lived, a succession of blooms are common on each flowering stalk and this gives the gardener a much longer period for enjoyment than what its name suggests.

The modern daylily originated from plants growing in China and Japan where they have been cultivated for centuries. Early accounts in Chinese literature report the plant’s roots and flowers being used for food and medicine. Boiled young shoots and fresh roots were consumed to prevent a variety of ailments including fever, hemorrhage, jaundice and cirrhosis.

Within the last 75 years, hybridizers in England and the U.S. have bred great improvements into the daylily from the wild forms found in the Far East. Most of these have been directed at improving the form, flower color and hardiness. Wild daylilies originally were found to display only the colors of yellow, orange and red. Now the color range has expanded to pinks, purples, pastels, near-blue and a wide assortment of patterned colors and bitones.

Classification

Most daylilies grown in the St Louis area are classified as herbaceous perennials. This is distinctive because the tops die back to ground level during winter. As a result, the growing point called the crown and its fibrous roots are left below the soil surface protected from ice and snow. Some daylilies are evergreen meaning that part of the green foliage is retained throughout winter. Typically, these are grown in the South where winter temperatures infrequently drop below freezing.

Another way to classify daylilies is by flower color. Experts recognize six types of color patterns in daylilies:

Self: the petals and sepals are the same color

Blend: the petals and sepals blend two colors into each other

Polychrome: the flowers are a blend of many colors

Bitone: the petals and sepals are the same basic color but differ in the color shade

Bicolor: the petals and sepals are completely different in color

Banded or Eyezone: these are flowers that have a distinctively different color or color shade at the throat compared to the ends of the petals and sepals.

Where, When and How to Plant

Sunlight: Daylilies will bloom best if provided with full sun exposure for at least 6 to 8 hours each day during the summer. However, they will bloom satisfactorily with as little as 4 hours of sunlight. If the planting bed will be shaded, it is preferable that this happens in the afternoon when temperatures are high. You might expect that shading plantings will cause plants to elongate and be taller in general. Keep this in mind when ordering the plants for this type of site and choose a shorter cultivar. Also note that darker colored varieties are generally better suited to shade conditions. Pastel and light flower-colored varieties do best in full sun.

Soil: Daylilies are very adaptive to different soil types and can do well in either sandy or heavy clay soils. However, the best soil is one which is amended with peat or other organic materials such as leaf mulch or compost. When the bed is prepared, add about a bushel of organic matter for every 10 square feet of surface area and incorporate by tilling to a depth of one foot.

Drainage: Since daylilies are shallow-rooted, the best drainage should occur in the upper 6 inches of soil. Their root system should not be allowed to stand in water for long periods of time otherwise, the planting may become weak and overtime thin out.

Mixed Plantings: Because daylilies do best with full sunlight exposure, it is not advisable to interplant them with other plants which shade the area. Avoid areas with trees and large shrubs unless the tops of these are thin or kept thin to allow sunlight through.

Time to Plant: The best time to plant is either in the spring or fall for this area. Spring plantings generally will not flower fully in the first year until the root system becomes well established. Avoid planting during periods of extreme heat. Fall planting may occur in late August to early September. It is important that the plants are able to establish a root system prior to the onset of cold temperatures and this take about 6 to 8 weeks.

How to Plant: Plants purchase by mail order should be planted immediately after receipt since they have been dug and in transit for an unknown period. Typically, daylilies are very durable and store for several weeks if the temperature and moisture conditions are not extreme. Plants should be soaked for a few hours or overnight prior to planting. The root system can be trimmed back to 8 to 12 inches and the tops cut to 6 to 8 inches tall if they have not been already by the grower.

Prepare the soil in the bed or planting hole prior to buying or receipt of the plants. It should be amended with plenty of organic matter to a depth of one foot. If you are planting individual plants, the hole should be about twice the width as the spread of the root system. Set each plant into a hole so that the growing point (crown) is about one to two inches below the soil surface and cover the roots with soil, mounding slightly to compensate for settlement.

Spacing: Mass plantings can be very attractive and perhaps is the most common method of display. Plants should be spaced 18 to 24 inches apart in the bed to allow for foliage and root spread. If planted too close, the flowering performance will drop off in two or three years because of crowding and competition for water, light and nutrients. You will be able to tell when the bed needs to be replanted by the lack of flower production in the center of the bed. Generally, this may happen 3 to 5 years after planting. At that time, the plants should be dug in the fall, the crowns divided and the bed reworked and planted again.

Care and Maintenance

Watering: Daylilies are very forgiving plants when it comes to water requirements. This is because of their fleshy tuberous root system which manages to store water. Supply of water is critical in the spring and early summer during flowering. The amount of water will affect the flowering performance and length of bloom period. Good watering practices are in order. Avoiding overhead application that can spot the flowers and watering briefly to a shallow depth. Water should be applied to a depth of 8 to 10 inches once each week. This gives a good soaking of the ground and allows the roots time to dry out so as to avoid root rot by bacterial and fungal pathogens.

Fertilization: Spring plantings of daylilies and established beds should be fertilized once if the garden soil is typical. Apply 1 pound of 5-10-10 or 5-10-5 for every 100 square feet of bed or about 1 tablespoon around each plant. This should be incorporated into the soil by tilling prior to planting a new bed or scratched into the soil with established beds. Spring fertilization will ensure good flower stalk and flower production. If too much fertilizer is applied, the plants may become overgrown and the flower production will decrease. So follow fertilizer label recommendations closely.

Generally, most beds will produce about 3 to 4 weeks of bloom and then undergo a dormant period during the high heat of summer. This rest period is a time when the bed can be fertilized once again. After the rest period, plants will begin to produce a new growth of foliage. Fertilizer applied during the rest period will help determine the size of the plants and maximize the number of blooms for next year. Apply a low nitrogen source of fertilizer at this time; 1 pound of 3-12-12 or 4-8-12 per 100 square feet of bed is generally sufficient. Too much nitrogen will force the tops to grow tall and this may weaken their winter hardiness.

If you are in doubt of how much fertilizer to apply, collect a soil sample and have it tested. If levels of phosphate and potassium are ample, apply only nitrogen fertilizer. This goes for the spring application also. The best source of nitrogen fertilizer is one which is acidic like ammonium sulfate or ammonium nitrate since daylilies like more acid soils.

Mulching: Daylilies like many other herbaceous perennials like to be mulched with wood chips, straw, leaf mulch or compost materials. Mulch will improve moisture retention, soil tilth, buffer effects of freezing and thawing and control weeds. After planting a bed, apply a two-inch layer of organic material. Replace this as it decomposes each season.

Clean-up: In the spring, remove the dead leaf remains of the previous season prior to fertilizing and mulching the bed. These remains may harbor overwintering diseases and insects. At the end of the bloom period, remove the old flower stalks. Seed pods which continue to develop on intact stalks drain the plant of reserves which otherwise could be directed back into the plant to support next season's flower production.

Insects and Diseases

There are not many insect or disease problems on daylilies in general, however depending upon the season, some pests can cause damage to daylily beds. The most prominent problems are with the insects and include aphids, spider mites and thrips. All of these feed on plant sap. The resultant injury can weaken the plants and reduce flower production if not controlled. Of the diseases, a few fungal leaf spot problems may appear, but are of little significance. The only disease worth noting is bacterial soft rot.

Aphids: These are small insects which suck sap from plant cells directly. Generally, the damage is seen on young, tender foliage in the late spring to early summer before flowering. The foliage may turn a yellow color where feeding is heavy.

Spider Mites: These pests are very small and almost too difficult to detect with the naked eye. They feed on plant cells by rupturing the cell walls and lap up the sap as it leaks out. Most damage will be noticed during the warm part of the season as they like dry and heated conditions. The symptoms look similar to aphid damage; leaf yellowing, however, most of the injury will be noticed on older and outer leaves close to the base of the plant where mites like to hide. Close inspection of off-colored leaves will show some webbing. This is best seen with a hand magnifying glass or microscope and should be checked by an experienced diagnostician.

Thrips: These insects damage the flowers only; not the foliage. They can be seen with the naked eye and appear like grey to black dots. Thrips may be hard to find during the day because they like to hide in the base of the plant where the foliage is tight or in the closed or partially open flower buds down in the petal axes. They damage the flower buds by rubbing their legs over the plant tissue surface and cause the sap to leak out. This rubbing will leave the flower petals with white streaks and this is the most noticeable symptom diagnostic of thrip injury.

Bacterial Soft Rot: This disease is caused by a bacterium that is naturally present in most all garden soils and enters a weakened host at the crown or through the roots. Symptoms include a rapid collapse of the foliage. Inspection of the crown will show that it is water-soaked, very soft and has a foul odor. The only time this disease is a problem is where plants sit in water for extended periods during summer when temperatures are warm. Simply avoiding poor drainage conditions will solve this problem.

Landscaping with Daylilies

How to use daylilies in and around the home is often a personal choice. Because of the wide color and height selections, a place in any landscape can be found to accommodate one or more daylilies. Here are a few important questions to ask yourself:

- 1) Is the planting used as a dominant, focal point for the yard?
- 2) What will the background be and does it require a certain sized plant?
- 3) Do you want a continuous bloom for an extended season or short season?
- 4) Do the plants need to fit into a special place where it is windy, high traffic, steep slope, rock garden etc.?

Against Buildings (Foundations): Typically, when plants are positioned against a building or foundation, they are used to cover the base of the structure and grow to a certain height to provide a backdrop for other plants yet not cover windows and other prominent building features. Colorwise, if the background is dark, then select a cultivar with a light colored flower like yellow, white, or a pastel shade. Darker colored flowering daylilies should be used where the building color is light.

Borders and Walks: Depending upon the area you have to work with, a winding path of large to small clumped daylilies can be very attractive to frame the path. Where you are looking for a subtle effect, choose a dwarf cultivar that will grow only 12 inches tall. A bushier effect can be achieved with taller selections, however, the growing space requires more area and you should be concerned with shading effects on other low growing plantings.

Mass Plantings: one of the best ways to landscape with daylilies is to establish a large planting consisting of several tiers or rows of plants. Instead of mixing deep and light colored selections, work with a distinct color base like pink and build the bed with those plants that show variation in color tint and tone; light pink, bright pink, creamy pink etc.

Interplanting: Since daylilies are typically early summer flowering plants, it is sometimes desirable to bring color to a bed before the plants go into flower. This can be done by inter-planting with daffodils. These make good companion plants positioned between individuals or rows of daylilies. They begin to flower early in the spring and bring color to the bed. After flowering, the foliage will start to die back just as the foliage of the daylilies becomes tall enough to hide the yellowing daffodil leaves.

Bloom Time: In general, daylilies can bloom from spring until frost depending upon the selection and the weather conditions. Many daylilies developed today have been selected to bloom for extended periods. Also, certain varieties are capable of reblooming a second time later in the season. These are known as "remontant" types and generally what you find is a bloom period in early May to June followed by a rebloom period in late fall if temperatures remain moderate and heavy amounts of rainfall have occurred over the season.

Recommended Daylilies

The following daylilies are recommended for growing in the St. Louis Area. Important factors to consider include color, bloom period and size. Listed here are selections which are available from local or mail order sources.

Cultivar	Flower Height (inches)	Bloom size (inches)	Bloom Period
Red			
Charles Johnson	24	6	E, M, Re
Stop Sign	29	6	M, L
Dale Lenington	14	3	M
Ed Murray	30	4	M
Pardon Me	18	3	M, Re
Roman Candle	30	7	M
RedYellow			
MaryTodd	26	6	E,
So Lovely	30	6	M, L
Green Flutter	20	3	L, Re
Welsh Prince	28	6	M, Re
Orange			
Luxury Lace	32	5	M, Re
Prester John	26	5	E, M, Re
Ardent Affair	32	6	M, L
Dainty Delight	18	3	M, Re
Uttle Deeke	20	5	EE, Re
No Idea	26	6	M
Pink			
Fairy Tale Fink	24	6	M, Re
IdaWimberly Munson	28	6	M, L, Re
Katie	20	6	E, M
Abbeville Sunset	20	6	E

Beloved Ballerina	28	6	E, M, Re
Pink Goodie	20	4	M
Purple			
Malachi	30	6	E, M
Persian Plum	30	6	E, Re
Chinese Kite	20	7	E, M, Re
Siloam Purple Plum	17	4	E, M
Song of Soloman	25	8	M
Whopper Flopper	26	6	E, M, Re
Merry Miss	22	6	M, L
Reblooming			
Stella De Oro (Gold Seli)	11	3	E, M, Re
Everblooming Doll (Yellow Self)	22	4	E, Re
Whiskey On Ice (Amber Yellow Blend)	28	7	E, M, Re
Hope Diamond (Near White Self)	14	4	E, M, Re
Whopper Flopper (Lavender/Deeper Eye)	26	8	E, M, Re
Miniature			
Buffys Doll (Pink/Rose Eye)	12	3	M, Re
Dale Lenington (Ruby Red)	14	3	M
ToyTrubador (Red Self)	12	2	L
Double Cutie (Chartreuse Self)	13	4	E, M, Re
Tasty Choice (Cream Pink Self)	12	7	E, Re

EE = Extra Early; E = Early; M = Mid season; L = Late season; Re = Reblooming