

DAYLILY (HEMEROCALLIS)

Exciting things have been happening in the world of daylilies! Hybridizers have been improving plant characteristics so that we continue to have an increasingly wide range of heights, fragrances, bloom sizes, colours, bud counts, bloom periods and petal shapes available. Blue is the only flower colour not yet available. Some daylilies are also available with double blooms. Currently there are at least 35 thousand registered cultivars with many new additions being made every year. Many are award-winners. Daylilies are now considered one of the most popular of all flowering perennials.

FLOWERING

True daylilies are members of the genus *Hemerocallis*. Although each bloom will only last for one day, there can be so many buds on a single flower scape (stem) that a clump, once established, can bloom for weeks on end. Some cultivars continue to send up more scapes and extend the flowering season even further and there are extended bloomers where individual blooms last for more than 16 continuous hours. By selecting daylilies with different bloom times, you can have a continuous flower display throughout the summer.

LOCATION

Daylilies are very easy to care for but they do not thrive on neglect. Daylilies will grow in almost any type of soil but they prefer soil that has been amended to a depth of 8 – 12", with organic matter such as compost, composted manure and premoistened peat moss. The more organic matter that is added, the happier and healthier the plants will be. They can be easily planted or divided during the season, but no later than 4 to 6 weeks prior to a hard frost to allow for a new root system to develop before the onset of winter.

Much of the literature suggests daylilies can be grown in some shade, however, experience has shown that daylilies thrive best in full sun. With less light, flower production declines and plant vigor is lost. Daylilies can be planted in any garden situation that receives half to a full day of continuous sunlight. Those that are planted in full sun locations will produce the greatest show of blooms. Blooms of the darker, deeply coloured cultivars may not be sun-fast and therefore might need protection from the hot afternoon sun in order to avoid fading.

PLANTING

To plant, add some bone meal to the planting hole, gently spread the roots apart and plant over a small mound of earth. Do not plant any deeper than they were originally growing in the container or above the white band on a bare-rooted plant. Space plants no less than 2 feet (60cm) apart and water in well to remove air pockets. Deep watering, twice a week, will help produce more vigorous plants and blooms. Critical watering times are in early spring as buds and scapes are forming, and during the summer. Avoid watering the blooms to prevent spotting. Watering after blooms have finished will also ensure a good bloom season the following year.

FERTILIZER

New plantings benefit from an application of transplant solution (5-15-5). Daylilies will also enjoy an early spring and mid summer application of fertilizer; however, no amount of fertilizer will replace or compensate for a well-prepared planting bed, rich in organic matter!

DIPLOIDS AND TETRAPLOIDS

There are eleven pairs of chromosomes in a standard daylily, known as a diploid. Tetraploids contain twice as many chromosomes. Tetraploids usually produce larger blooms with thicker petals and brighter colours; they are the way of the future. Daylilies are also categorized as dormant, semi-evergreen, or evergreen. Dormant implies that the total plant dies to the ground in winter. In southern Ontario, all daylilies will go 'dormant'. Those classified as dormant are generally hardier. Semi-evergreen types should be mulched with at least 6 inches of shredded leaves and evergreen boughs to insulate them for the winter. Spent daylily leaves may be removed in the spring. Every 3 to 5 years, daylilies should be lifted and divided. This will help to restore vigor in the plant, which in turn results in more blooms.

INSECTS

Few pests bother daylilies. Thrips, earwigs and slugs can cause some damage. Some plants suffer from what is locally called 'spring sickness' where early spring leaves emerge contorted and twisted. This may be a fungus at work but it will not affect later growth or blooms.

SOME MINIATURE BLOOM SELECTIONS

Camden Gold Dollar, Countess Carrots, Eenie Allegro, Happy Returns, Little Audrey, Little Bumblebee, Little Carnation, Little Dandy, Little Fantastic, Pardon Me, Peach Fairy, Penny's Worth, Stella de Oro