

## Daylilies: For the Generations

Plants that have existed in gardens for hundreds of years are admired for a reason. Our mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers may have known a list of traits that make a good “pass-along plant.” First and foremost, the plant had to be easy to propagate. Then it had to be tough, pretty, and usable. The final item on the list – there must be memories attached to the plant.

A good pass-along plant for your garden is the daylily, from the genus *Hemerocallis* (pronounced hem-er-oh-CAL-iss). Daylilies are a snap to grow, beautiful to see, and easy to divide and share.

Daylilies have existed for hundreds of years. Originally native to Asia in areas of China, Korea and Japan, they first jumped to Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, then on to the New World. The traveling daylilies became treasured and shared with family members, neighbors, and friends. Soon the trumpet shaped flowers appeared along roadways and cemeteries as the plants naturalized on their own with ease.

According to the Invasive Plant Atlas of the United States, “*Hemerocallis fulva* established in natural areas pose a threat to native plants in field, meadows, floodplains, moist woods and forest edges.” So, use caution when deciding what species to plant.

The hero in daylily propagation history is A.B. Stout, a botanist and the father of the modern daylily. In the 1920’s Dr. Stout used worldwide daylily plants to create 50,000 crosses. His introduction of 100 new varieties created plants that are still grown and cherished today.

When choosing a new daylily, look for the Stout Silver Medal recognition, awarded by the American Hemerocallis Society in honor of Arlow Burdette Stout. The plant will have texture, form, size, and beauty.

Flowers bloom in spring and summer. A mature plant can produce 200-plus blooms, with each flower blooming only for a day. The green leaf blades are a backdrop of texture to a rising stalk (scape) of unique and colorful flowers. Depending on the variety, some plants will grow to a height of one foot, whereas others will tower to four feet.

Just as plant size varies, so does flower size. Small plants like Stella d’Oro have small golden flowers that bloom once, then later repeat and bloom again. Larger flowers come in an array of colors from almost white to deep, dark purple. Other choices include lavender, pink, orange, red,



salmon, and yellow. Some varieties have double blooms and others have ruffled petals. The wide choice of size, color, and attributes contributes to daylily's reputation for vigor and variety.

While shopping for daylilies, remember label terminology such as "tetraploid" and "re-blooming." Tetraploids have stronger, thicker blossoms in vibrant colors. Re-blooming means the day lily will bloom again during the season.

"Easy-to-grow" is a daylily's claim to fame. Six hours of sunlight and organic material worked into the soil is a great starting point for keeping the plant happy. Don't plant them too deeply. Plant, along with the soil in the pot the plant comes in, at ground level. Water consistently until established, then only as needed. Daylilies are drought tolerant after the roots become established.

A springtime boost of 10-10-10 fertilizer with another boost during the bloom cycle will add strength and increase flowers the following year. After the flowers are spent, remove the old seed pods to increase production the following year. A vigorous plant that likes where it is growing can be divided and the young plants passed along every three to four years.

Daylilies' super-star abilities may provide a great asset for your design needs. Blocks of daylilies are beautiful and striking. Hillsides can be stabilized with large plantings of daylilies. They also create unique and colorful edging along driveways and sidewalks. Where other plants have failed, a strong daylily may have a far better chance to survive and thrive.

Many times "old is new" plants can create an exciting addition to your yard. They have the ability to adapt and thrive. The memories that go hand in hand with a pass-along plant add to the pleasure of seeing the plant in your garden. Then share those plants and memories with others to create a new generation of plant lovers.

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