

Garden Center Guides



Daylilies

The classic look of daylilies has been around for years with the common Tawny daylily adorning roadsides with orange flowers. Hybridization of this rugged perennial has improved size, color and flowering ability. The botanical name for daylily is *Hemerocallis*, meaning “beautiful for a day.” As the name suggests, individual blooms last for only one day, but new buds open and blooming is continuous for weeks.

Daylilies can be used for massing along borders, on banks to hold the ground, or as specimen plants exhibiting special qualities of color and size. Daylily plants have several to an abundance of long slender bright green leaves that arch to the ground. Flowers form at the tip of flower stalks called scapes, which arise from the center of the foliage. Each stalk has numerous buds that open at different times. One daylily can produce as many as 200 to 400 flowers per season and remain in bloom for about 30 days.

Plants range from 1 to 4 feet in height. Flower size, shape and color varies. Petals may overlap or bend backwards. They may have ruffled or crinkled edges, or be shaped like trumpets or bells. Some varieties are self-cleaning but most benefit from deadheading. Bloom time can vary from June to August. Other varieties are considered re-bloomers and bloom repetitively throughout the summer. The tetraploid type is a thick-petaled daylily that produces a large flower suited for a specimen plant.

One of the reasons daylilies have persisted in gardens across the country is their ease in growing. These plants can survive adverse conditions and are trouble free, lasting many years if undisturbed.

Location

Daylilies grow best in full sun or in a location with 6 hours of sun. The daylily is adaptable to most Kansas soils, and not too particular about soil type. It is best not to plant daylilies too close to trees where they will compete for moisture or nutrients.

Daylilies have the reputation for surviving anywhere but are responsive to fertile, loamy soils amended with organic matter. Fertilize daylilies annually with a light application of nitrogen after plants enter dormancy in the fall and/or early spring when new growth emerges. Excessive fertilization may result in over-growth of foliage and sparse blooming.

Planting

Fall is an ideal time for planting daylilies. September works well. Roots remain active and flowers for the next year begin to form. Daylilies also can be planted in the spring.

Before planting, prepare the bed by working the soil 6 to 8 inches deep and incorporating 2 inches of organic matter such as compost or well-rotted manure. Fertilize the bed as needed based on recommendations from a soil test. Dig the planting hole deep enough to accommodate the roots without bending or breaking them. Cut the foliage back to 5 or 6 inches. Place the plant so the crown (where the stem and roots meet) is no deeper than 1 inch below the soil line. Firm the soil around the base of the plant and water thoroughly.

Space large daylily varieties at least 30 inches apart and smaller varieties around 2 feet apart. Planting several plants of each variety in the same area creates visual impact.

Care

Insect control is usually not necessary. Occasionally aphids may infest plants in the whorl of leaves at the base, or thrips may feed on the flower buds. Control these pests with insecticidal soap or other labeled insecticide. Remove seed pods after blooming to prevent seed production and insure good flowering the following year. Removing seed pods will

prevent seedling plants from coming up in the bed. Remove stalks (scapes) at the end of the growing season. In early spring, remove the previous year's dead foliage and clean the bed. Summer mulching will help prevent weeds and conserve moisture. Leafspot is a fungal disease that affects daylilies. It causes unsightly blotches that look as if the leaf is dying. This disease is most common in hot humid weather, and spores overwinter in garden debris. The disease can be treated with a fungicide to prevent it from spreading. Good garden clean up each fall and spring will aid prevention.

Division

Daylilies should be divided every 2 to 5 years. They reach their prime flower production about the third year. When flowering declines, divide and re-set plants to rejuvenate them. The longer a plant grows in the same location without division, the more difficult it will be to separate the clumps.

Cut around the entire plant with a sharp flat shovel and lift the clumps out of the ground with a gardening fork. Using a garden fork will cause less damage to the roots and leave much of the excess soil. Wash off any soil left on the roots and cut the plant into sections. Each division or section should have about three strong fans or crowns. Cut tops back to 6 inches on large growing plants and 3 inches on dwarf plants. Trim broken or damaged roots or tops and reset plants as described in the planting section. Divide plants around September or early spring as new growth emerges.

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