



## Daylilies are Delightful

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

While July does typically bring us hot and humid weather, it also brings us a wealth of gorgeous, daylily blooms. Daylilies (*Hemerocallis* spp.) are not true lilies, which originate from bulbs, but instead grow from fleshy roots. They have few insect and disease problems, unlike true lilies that are plagued by those red lily leaf beetles. It is true that deer do like to munch on some daylily cultivars more than others. Although I'd rather leave them in the garden for show, every part of a daylily is edible, and one can even find recipes for battered daylily buds and the like, online.

Each flower lasts but a day so the Latin name, *Hemerocallis*, is most appropriate, derived from the Greek words 'hemera' meaning day and 'kallus' meaning beautiful. With thousands of named varieties to choose from, the hardest part about growing daylilies is deciding which ones to grow.



Photo by dmp,2021

There are solid and bicolored daylilies, ones with double flowers, miniatures, scented types, and those is interesting flower shapes, such as spiders. Visit some local garden centers, look online or consider joining the Connecticut Daylily Society ([www.ctdaylilyclub.com](http://www.ctdaylilyclub.com)) to help you select some desirable cultivars for your particular location.

Bare rooted daylilies are sold and planted mostly in the spring. For good establishment, it is important to prepare the soil before planting and dig a hole wide enough to accommodate the root system. Potted daylilies can be planted any time throughout the growing season although any plants set in during hot weather will need extra watering. Most plants benefit from being planted during cooler spring or fall periods.

Care for daylilies is very easy. Newly planted daylilies should obviously be regularly watered until well established. Plants benefit from a natural or synthetic fertilizer spread at recommended rates (either by soil test or directions on package) once each year in the spring. Daylilies are tolerant of a wide range of soil pH but would prefer to that the soil be somewhere in the 6s. If your soil is on the acidic side, limestone can be added every couple of years.

Sometimes plants have a height accompanying their description. The heights refer to the length of the leafless stems (called scapes) that the flower buds form on. Some can get as tall as 6 feet! Think about the length of these stems when deciding placement of your daylilies. Shorter varieties are great for front of the border or edging. Mid-size or taller sorts may be better towards the back or center.

Mature plants may send up 6 or more scapes, each sporting maybe a dozen flower buds. The flowers don't all open at the same time. To keep plants neat looking, go through every day or two and remove the spent blossoms.

Once all flowers have open and faded, scapes can be cut back to the ground. This is done to tidy up plants but also to prevent plants from putting energy into seed production, unless you are trying to hybridize in which case you would want seed produced. Often after blooming, lower leaves turn yellow and then brown. They can be removed as you cut down the spent scapes. Some daylily cultivars are more vigorous than others and division might be necessary after 3 to 5 years. Daylilies are best divided after bloom. Pick a cloudy day to dig plants. Shake and gently hose off the soil from the roots or they can be placed in a large tube of water to loosen the soil. Locate the crown of the plant and starting at the outer part of the clump, break off into smaller starts each having several leaves and a healthy set of roots. Replant your divisions and make sure they receive adequate water.

While the divisions might take a year or two to get established, they will reward you with reliable, blooms for years to come. If you have questions about growing or caring for daylilies or on any home or garden topic, contact the UConn Home & Garden Education Center, toll-free in CT, at (877) 486-6271, visit us at [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu) or call your local Cooperative Extension Center.