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Daylilies: Elegant and Tough Perennials



Daylilies (*Hemerocallis* sp.) are a favorite among gardeners – from the serious (can't get them out of the garden) to the weekend-warrior (a little weeding on the weekend is enough, thank you). How can one plant satisfy these very different types of gardeners? Daylilies appeal to weekend warriors as an undemanding plant with few needs while serious gardeners are wowed by the sheer number of varieties in cultivation, and both gardeners are captivated by the beauty of daylilies. [Click here to read more about daylilies.](#)

Daylilies grow naturally at forest margins, in mountainous areas, and marshy areas in China, Korea and Japan. They have been hybridized since the 1920s. From just 20 species over 30,000 named cultivars have been raised. Now that's a popular perennial!

The genus name, *Hemerocallis*, means 'beautiful for a day' in Greek. Each daylily bloom lasts for only a day but is quickly replaced by new blooms the next day.

Daylilies are clump-forming perennials with some rhizomatous (spreading) varieties. Their dark green foliage is strap-like and arching, and remains attractive even after the plants are done blooming. Trumpet-shaped flowers are borne on tall scapes (like Hostas). Most daylilies are remontant which means they flower repeatedly throughout the summer.

It's hard to beat daylilies for variety of color and flower shapes. Colors range from nearly white through yellow and orange to dark purple and deep red-black. Many flowers are two-toned. Flower-forms can be triangular, circular, star-shaped, spider-shaped, or double.

In descriptions of daylilies you'll often come across the words "diploid" (having two identical sets of chromosomes in each cell) and "triploid" (having three sets of identical chromosomes in each cell). So why does this matter? Plant breeders have found that triploid daylilies tend to have larger flowers, more intense colors, sturdier scapes, and enhanced vigor. Diploid daylilies tend to have more graceful flower form, produce more spider-shaped and double blooms, and the best pink daylilies are all diploids.

Daylilies have the uncanny ability to look at home in either a naturalized or formal garden setting. Taller varieties make wonderful accent plants while shorter varieties are very effective in mass plantings.

Grow daylilies in full sun to part-shade (some red and purple-flowered varieties prefer to stay out of the hottest sun). They can tolerate just about any soil type and some drought but perform best in evenly moist soil. Give them a light application of organic fertilizer in the spring and fall. They don't need much more than that! Daylilies are generally pest-free but can be bothered by aphids and thrips.

Let's take a look at just a few varieties that exemplify the breadth of color, flower-form, and mature size available in daylilies:

'Always Afternoon' bears eye-catching, large (5 ½"), mauve-colored blooms with buff edges, purple eyezones and green throats. Blooms start early and continue throughout the season. A tetraploid with sturdy scapes reaching to 22" tall and circular-shaped flowers.

'American Revolution' is a tall (28") daylily with that adds bold color to the landscape with black-red buds that open to star-shaped velvety black to deep red flowers with green throats and recurved petals. Flowers are 4" across. This is a free-flowering diploid that blooms early through mid-season.



'Fairy Tale Pink' is a mid-season bloomer with pale orange-pink to beige-pink, ruffled petals on large (5 ½" across), circular-formed flowers. This is a free-flowering diploid that reaches 24" tall.

'Sherwood Cheer' makes a statement at nearly 36" tall with 6-7" blooms! The flowers are a blend of orange – rose with green throats. A repeat bloomer beginning in mid-season.



'Stella D'Oro': one of the most popular daylilies, loved for its profusion of small (2 ½") cheerful, yellow blooms that cover this plant in early summer and continue throughout the season. Its shorter stature (12") makes it ideal for containers or for the front of the border. A free-flowering diploid with circular flowers.



'Strawberry Candy' is a large-flowered (4 ½") tetraploid. A must for those who love pink – the ruffled petals have strawberry-pink edges with raspberry-colored eyezones and green throats. Mature height is 26".

Get the daylily bug – once you plant a few you'll only want more!