



GARDEN NOTES

TOUGH AND COLORFUL DAYLILIES

By Dennis Hinkamp

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“One plant that may need flowers to justify its existence is the daylily,” says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. “Now don’t get me wrong, I love daylilies, I even have a small collection of my own, but the foliage is not really eye-catching. It reminds me of a tall, weedy, grass that’s gone bad.”

One of the reasons the foliage is rough looking may be because daylilies are one of the toughest perennials to grow in our area, he explains. They are drought tolerant, can be grown in almost any soil and need little extra care. As far as maintenance and adaptability, they are about as rugged as they come.

Daylilies originated in the Far East, from such lands as Japan, China and Korea, he says. They have been valued for their medicinal value for thousands of years and also used as a food source and in many oriental art forms.

Most daylilies begin flowering about the middle of June, and can still be blooming when school starts in the fall, Goodspeed says. The flowers form on top of a tall, leafless stem known as a scape. The scapes grow above the foliage allowing the flowers to shine.

Until about 1940, when people pictured daylilies, they pictured a small, orange or yellow flower, he says. This all changed in the late 1940s when hybridizing daylilies became popular. Today, there are more than 30,000 different cultivars ranging in color from deep red to bright yellow, purple to rose, and every color combination in between. Some of them are truly magnificent.

The flowers themselves also come in different shapes and forms, he adds. Some have the traditional trumpet-shaped flowers, while others have a circular form. Some of my favorites are more spider-like in shape, with long, narrow petals; others are more star shaped. When it comes right down to it, daylily flowers come in nearly any shape or color.

Most daylilies are diurnal, which means the flower opens in the morning and closes when it gets dark, Goodspeed says. Most blossoms only live for a day or two, but there are 10 to 50 buds on each scape. With many scapes in each clump, the plant can blossom for many weeks, and some newer cultivars bloom almost the entire growing season.

“Once the flowers begin to fade, it is beneficial to deadhead (remove) the spent

blossoms.,” he says. “Daylilies can be planted throughout the landscape. Incorporate a few different cultivars in a perennial bed to add summer color and a little height. They also work well as a back-drop for a planting area, or as a border or small hedge.”

Although daylilies are tough and can be grown almost anywhere, they do prefer sunny locations, which encourages them to bloom a little better, he says. They also do not like their roots sitting in water. Provide drainage if the area has a high water table or heavy soil.

They can also become somewhat chlorotic if they are over-watered or placed in heavy soils, Goodspeed says. A little all-purpose fertilizer in the spring helps keep them healthy and a deep green color. Few pests bother daylilies, and they are aggressive enough to choke out most weeds.

Over time daylilies form into a large clump, Goodspeed says. This mass of foliage needs to be divided every few years to keep it healthy and happy. Fortunately daylilies are easy to divide with a garden fork and shovel in the early spring. Dig the clump out of the ground, jab the fork into the middle of the clump, then pry the plant into two smaller clumps. If it becomes too difficult and frustrating, use the shovel to hack through the middle of the clump. The remaining clumps will do just fine once they are planted back into the ground.

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