

Becoming time to plant popular daylilies

By Stephanie Smith, Ph.D.

Daylilies are very popular in our area of Texas, and fall is the time to plant them. They are sometimes referred to as the perfect perennial because they are available in a wide range of colors, shapes, and sizes; they survive in a wide range of climates; they are suitable for all types of landscapes and they are drought resistant and almost disease and insect free. In addition, they are known to bloom from late spring until the fall.

Daylilies are members of the lily family Liliaceae, the same family that onions and hyacinths belong to. Daylilies belong to the genus *hemerocallis*.

Daylilies originated in the temperate parts of Asia. However, they have been bred in the United States and England for a long time. Breeders have created daylilies with a range of colors, from near white to near blue and every color in between.

The orange and yellow daylilies that are common along country roads are pre-hybrid types that were cultivated and remained after old homesteads and farms reverted to pasture.

As mentioned, Daylilies come in a variety of colors. The blooms also come in a variety of shapes and sizes. When planning a landscape, you need to focus on these characteristics, along with the size of the blooms and the size of the plants.

Blooms come in three sizes. Miniature flowers are under three inches in diameter. Small flowers are from three inches up to four and a half inches in diameter. Large flowers are four and a half inches or larger in diameter. Most flowers open early in the morning and last until the evening of that day, then die.

Nocturnal Daylilies bloom in the late afternoon and last until morning or early afternoon. Finally, extended daylilies remain open for at least 16 hours and can be diurnal or nocturnal.

Flowers are perched on stalks called scapes. Each scape can support anywhere from 10 to 100 flowers. Scapes also come in three sizes. Low scapes are from six to 24 inches high. Medium scapes are from 24 to 36 inches high. Tall scapes are over 26 inches high. Day lilies are planted in September and October, like other members of the Lily family. When planted, you bury the roots and the base of the crown, but not anything above that.

You can determine the right depth by looking at the plant. Above the roots, the crown is white. It gradually becomes green. Do not bury the green part, only the white part of the crown.

Daylilies need full sun in the morning to open properly. However, a full day of full sun may be too hard on them due to our hot temperatures. Full sun in the morning and mid to late afternoon shade is best, although full sun in the morning and partial shade in the afternoon will work. Of course, you can plant them where they get full sun all day, but they may burn up in the heat.

Daylilies are drought resistant as adults. However, they need more water to get started as babies. When planting, water the daylily well. Water every two days for the first week, then every two to three days for the next week. Do not overwater — you want to keep them moist.

After two weeks, water one inch a week, all at once, preferably in the early morning. You need to continue watering your daylilies

throughout the year, including the winter.

If you have a type that goes dormant, the leaves will die back and only the underground parts of the crown and roots will remain. The other parts will grow again in the spring, so do not worry about them disappearing.

Daylilies need fertilizer in the spring, generally January or February, and in the fall, generally October or November. Most homeowners will need to fertilize with nitrogen, some will need to add phosphorous and potassium.

Getting a soil test done in December will tell you what you need to add to your flower bed for the coming season and will help you optimize the fertilizer you apply. In addition to fertilizing your daylilies, you should mulch them to help hold down weeds and hold in water. This will help them through the long, dry summers here.

Finally, daylilies are susceptible to aphids in the early spring, which can cause them not to bloom. Once the flowers bloom, you may have problems with thrips.

You can use organic methods to control these, such as lady bugs for the aphids and neem oil for both the aphids and thrips, or you can use a pesticide rated for use on daylilies. Make sure whatever you used is approved for use on daylilies and be sure and follow the label directions.

For further information, you can contact the national daylily club, the American Hemerocallis Society. They can be found at www.daylilies.org. If this article has peaked your curiosity, they have lots of information on daylilies and how to grow them,

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