

## NOT JUST A PRETTY FACE

It was the “tough as nails” quality of daylilies that first attracted me to them. When we bought our property, we were not living on it full-time and I wanted to add some colour using plants that would survive without frequent watering. My mother offered me some of her yellow-flowering daylilies and I knew these plants had thrived during many hot, dry and cool, wet summers with little maintenance. I divided a couple of large clumps and planted them along the front of a long border, in holes amended with composted sheep manure, and watered them in. With little attention they bloomed generously that summer, their grassy leaves stayed green throughout the season and they have thrived ever since.



**H. 'Barbary Corsair'**  
41 cm high, 7.6 cm bloom  
Midseason blooming

This first daylily came to me without a name, but I have since acquired several named cultivars: 'Barbary Corsair,' 'Canadian Border Patrol,' 'Daring Deception,' 'Salieri' and 'Satin Glass' are a few of these. However, there is more to a daylily's appeal than a charming name and ease of maintenance.

Often called “the perfect perennial,” the daylily's genus name, *Hemerocallis*, [hem-ur-oh-KAL-iss], comes from two Greek words meaning “day” (hemera) and “beauty” (kallos), appropriate because each flower lasts for one day. *Hemerocallis* is native to Asia and almost all the modern daylilies we see today are the result of work by hybridizers in England or the United States

These plants have earned their reputation as “the perfect perennial” because:

- More than 35,000 named and officially registered cultivars offer such a great diversity of colours, shapes, sizes and blooming times that, regardless of your preference or need, there will be a cultivar to please you.
- Once established – and they establish easily – daylilies are drought-tolerant and have very few disease or pest problems. They are a plant up to the challenges of our changing climate.
- Daylilies form neat clumps which, before and after flowering, continue to provide pleasing foliage in the landscape.
- The flowers are a nectar source for hummingbirds, bees and butterflies.



**H. 'Satin Glass'**  
86 cm high  
Midseason blooming

- The daylily is a wonderful ally to a garden designer looking for a plant to meet many roles in the landscape. I've seen daylilies used attractively around focal points like bird baths and lamp posts; along fences, foundations, sidewalks and driveways; as individual specimen plants; in masses and as ground covers; and in the front, middle or back of perennial or mixed borders.



Beausejour Daylily Gardens  
Photo by G. Puhacz



H. 'Prairie Belle'  
Beausejour Daylily Gardens  
Photo by M. Veldman

## OTHER INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT DAYLILIES

- Some daylilies have flowers that open in the evening and remain open until the following evening. Many of these are fragrant.
- The flowers of species daylilies are yellow, gold or orange. Pink, red and purple blooming daylilies are all the result of hybridizing. (There are also yellow, gold and orange hybrids.) The only colours that daylily hybridizers have not yet achieved are pure white and pure blue.
- Daylilies are edible. The tuberous roots can be sautéed or fried and the buds and flowers can be sautéed or used raw as a garnish. In Asia, they are also considered a source of medicines.
- It is a relief to know that the dreaded Lily Beetle (*Lilioceris lili*) that has been destroying Asiatic lilies in our gardens does not damage the daylily.

## CHOOSING YOUR “PERFECT” DAYLILY

Visit display gardens in June, July and August to find daylilies that appeal to you. Some of the characteristics to note while viewing the daylilies are:

**Flower Colour.** Adding to the diversity are colour of the throat (center area of the flower) and different colour patterns such as bicolor, eyed or banded, edged or picotéed. On the American Hemerocallis Society (AHS) website, the official description of *H.* ‘Daring Deception’ (one of my own garden favourites) is “pale lavender pink with black purple edge and black purple eyezone above green throat.”



*H.* ‘Daring Deception’  
61 cm high, 12.5 cm bloom  
Early Midseason blooming

**Flower Form.** Some of many different flower forms or shapes recognized by the AHS are single, double, spider, sculpted, star, and



*H.* ‘Saliere’  
66 cm high, 13.5 cm bloom  
Early-blooming

triangular. Having one or two of the unusual flower forms in your collection can be good conversation starters.

**Flower Size.** Flowers may be miniature (under 7.5 cm in diameter), small (from 7.5 cm to 11.25 cm) or large (11.25 cm and over). Choose different flower sizes for more interest.

**Height.** Height refers to the length of the scape and can be low (15-60 cm), medium (60-90 cm) or tall (more than 90 cm). The lower cultivars work well at the front of borders; the taller ones are appealing along walls and fences.

**Blooming Sequence.** This is designated by the AHS as Extra Early (EE), Early (E), Early Midseason (EM), Midseason (M), Late Midseason (LM), Late (L), Very Late (VL). *Extra Early* daylilies are the first to bloom, usually in June in our climate. *Midseason* cultivars bloom during the peak of daylily blooms, which is July in our region. *Late* bloom season comes 4-6 weeks after the peak. The Re bloomers can bloom more than once during a season. If you choose cultivars with various blooming times, you can enjoy these beauties in bloom from early summer until fall.

**Strong scapes, good branching and attractive foliage** are other considerations to keep in mind.



*H.* ‘Personal Hero’  
91 cm high, 15 cm bloom  
Late Blooming, Fragrant,  
(Photo by M. Veldman)

## PLANTING AND MAINTAINING DAYLILIES

To plant daylilies, the most important concerns are at least 6 hours of direct sun daily; soil with reasonable fertility and drainage; ensuring that the crown of the plant is not more than 2.5 cm below the soil surface; spacing at least 45 cm apart and watering well. I have found that mulching helps them to thrive and bloom generously, even during the hottest weeks of a Manitoba summer.

If there is little natural rain, watering in the spring when the plants are growing their scapes and buds, and during the blooming season, will ensure abundant flowering. To keep the garden looking attractive, dead-head spent blooms and remove any damaged foliage as it appears. When all the buds on a scape have bloomed, cut off the scape close to the ground. The remaining mound of grassy foliage will contribute to your garden's beauty for the rest of the growing season. In early spring, remove last year's dead foliage before new growth begins. Divide every 3-4 years or when you observe that the clump produces fewer scapes in a very thick mass of leaves.

## WHERE TO BUY DAYLILIES

Most of our local garden centres sell at least a few daylily cultivars. Ask if their plants have been grown in our climate zone.

Over 600 cultivars have been planted at the Beausejour Daylily Gardens. I have found the spring and fall plant sales at the Gardens to be a very good source of daylilies because they have grown successfully in our Manitoba climate, have over-wintered for a few years and are reasonably priced.

One of my summer pleasures is a morning stroll along my garden borders, coffee cup in hand. The newly-opened daylily blooms that greet me each day, with their diverse flower colours, forms and sizes, give me so much joy and ask for so little in return.

*Hemerocallis* – beauty for a day – the perfect perennial in so many ways.

\*\*\*

More information, including a database of AHS registered daylilies, can be found on the website of the American Hemerocallis Society:

<http://www.daylilies.org/>

For more information on the plant sales and other events at the Beausejour Daylily Gardens, see the website at <http://www.beausejourdaylilygardens.com/>



*H.* 'Canadian Border Patrol'  
71 cm high, 15 cm bloom  
Early Midseason blooming