

You're driving along a dusty prairie road in late summer, the grasshoppers scissoring in the high grass and crickets chirping in tandem with one another. You come across an abandoned homestead with an old farmhouse, its clapboard siding weathered to a fine silvery-grey patina. As you step through what's left of the front entrance, you see tattered remnants of lace curtains fluttering in the breeze through windows where the glass panes shattered long ago. A wall calendar from 1937 reads, "Coca Cola – the pause that refreshes."

There's little indication a family ever lived here ... except for that ubiquitous clump of bright orange daylilies still going strong in the flowerbed under the front porch window. Were they planted by the young farmer's new wife, when her dreams were still fresh and anything seemed possible?

The botanical name for daylilies is *Hemerocallis*. They arrived on eastern North American shores centuries ago with the arrival of the first settlers from Europe. Tough, durable roots ensured their survival, making them a popular plant. Many established settlers gifted newcomers with a clump to call their own. As European settlement pushed westward, the orange daylily rode along in the wagon trains.

The daylily happily adapted to its new home and spread across the country, thriving in urban, suburban and country gardens and, eventually, roadside ditches. When someone's clump became too big, unwanted extra roots were simply tossed into the nearest ditch; hence its common name—ditch lily.

Rebranding the "ditch lily"

The citizens of the town of Beausejour, about 60 km northeast of Winnipeg,

Manitoba, have turned the reputation of "ditch lilies" upside down. Located in Zone 2b, the Beausejour Daylily Gardens are North America's most northerly American Hemerocallis Society (AHS) and Canadian Hemerocallis Society (CHS) display garden. The garden began in 2002 as a park and tourist information site, championed by then mayor Fred Kazina and a local couple, Richard and Sandra Kisiloski, who donated a one-acre portion of their land to help create the park (the town bought the adjacent piece of property).

Initial site preparation was labour intensive, involving various tradespeople and local residents as well as inmates from the nearby Milner Ridge Correctional Centre. The land was levelled and the necessary infrastructure elements installed, including drainage ditches, culverts and pipes for water and electrical power. Two thousand yards of topsoil were deposited on the site. The Milner Ridge inmates built retaining walls for raised flowerbeds.

The gardens got off to a rough start as the summer of 2002 was hot, dry and

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An AHS display garden is meant

to educate the public and

showcase modern hybridized

daylily cultivars. A designated

AHS garden may be featured

in the American Hemerocallis

Society Journal and listed on the

AHS website (daylilies.org) as a

recommended stop for those who

admire daylilies. Accreditation

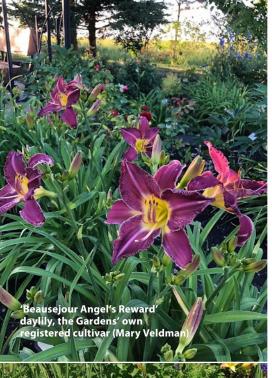
windy. While water pipes had been installed, there was no well, so water needed to be hauled in from town. (A well for the site was eventually dug in 2006.) There was no shelter, no shade. The wide-open site was continuously assailed by the wind. Parched topsoil was blown into nearby fields one day and blown back a few days later when

the fickle wind changed direction. Some of the initial cedar trees succumbed to the hot sun, which scorched them into desiccated brown crisps. Progress on the gardens stalled.

New hope arose when Carol Bender, the current coordinator for the gardens, came across a newspaper article about the creation of an AHS garden in Winnipeg's Assiniboine Park, the first such garden on the Canadian prairies.

After contacting the article's author, Carol determined that Beausejour had all the necessary characteristics to become an ideal AHS garden. In late 2002, garden-minded volunteer groups banded







together and approached town council with a proposal to create such a garden; town council approved.

With the help of the head gardener at Wasagaming, the townsite in Riding Mountain National Park, and Patrick Healey (aka Mr. Daylily), who had supplied both Wasagaming and Assiniboine Park with their daylilies, Carol and her bevy of volunteers obtained over 150 daylily cultivars and numerous other perennials. Planting took place over the summer and fall of 2003.

The volunteers christened themselves Friends of the Beausejour Daylily Gardens. They knew next to nothing about daylilies or the climate issues they would confront in their 2b planting zone but, as Carol says, "When you don't know any better, anything is possible." Just like the young farmer's wife, who planted

those orange daylilies under her front porch window almost a century ago; all her hopes had seemed possible too.

To obtain AHS certification, every daylily in a respective garden needs to be clearly marked with the name of both the cultivar (including height and colour) and the hybridizer.

Plant markers tend to be pricey, and since money was tight, ingenuity was the order of the day. Temporary markers were fashioned from the plastic slats of old venetian blinds. These were later replaced by markers made out of aluminum pop cans and framed with metal coat hangers. Over 3,000 pop can markers were made for the garden before these, too ,were replaced by more durable, weatherproof markers (although the coat hanger frames remain). A database and grid map were also created to identify every plant.

Another criterion for AHS accreditation is that the site must be well maintained. While the Town of Beausejour provides basic services, like keeping the grass mowed and the streetfront tidy, garden maintenance falls on the shoulders of volunteers. The gardens are divided into sections and a

volunteer gardener "adopts" a section and maintains it according to AHS standards. Each volunteer's section is identified by a whimsical, handpainted wooden folk-art angel, with the section number and name of the volunteer responsible for that section.







Carol and her first lieutenant, Mary Veldman, say they couldn't maintain the site without the hard work of these garden angels. Carol and Mary are also garden angels, but they have the added responsibility of keeping track of all the plants and determining which new ones will be given a coveted spot in the next growing season.

The gardens achieved the coveted accredited status of an AHS and CHS display garden in 2005. Winnipeg's Assiniboine Park daylily garden, which was the first to be accredited by the AHS, did not survive. The walkway had been created in an area with poor drainage, so the daylilies had to be removed and the Park lost official display garden status. The Beausejour site is the sole AHS accredited garden on the prairies.

Managing the gardens

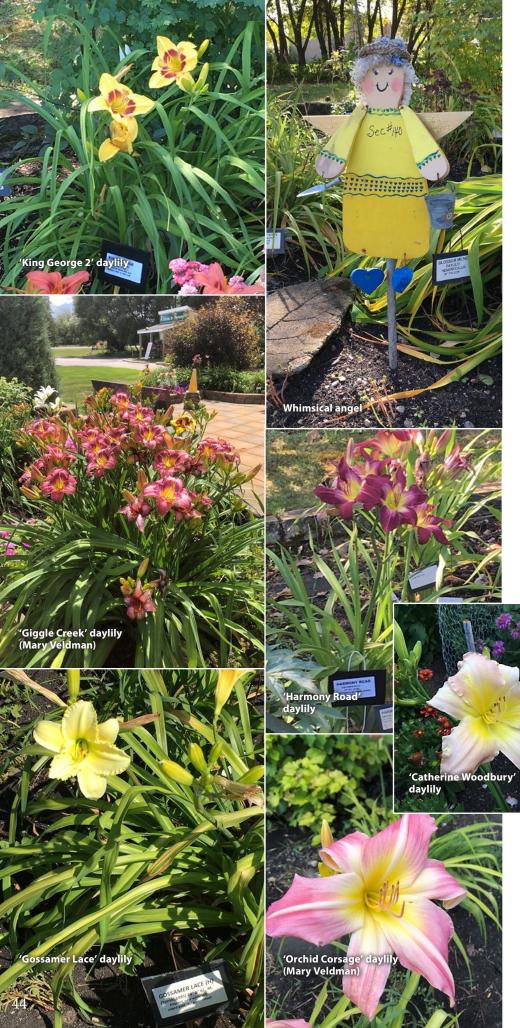
Today, the Beausejour Daylily Gardens are home to many varieties of iris, peonies, Oriental and Asiatic lilies and many other perennials, as well as various types of fruit trees and shrubs.

The gardens have taught the volunteers about patience, a necessary trait when dealing with various animal and insect pests. Jackrabbits nibble the tips from the cherry trees. Cottontail bunnies will sample virtually anything that's green. The dreaded scarlet lily beetle has a voracious appetite for the Oriental and Asiatic lilies. Fortunately, it has no interest in the daylilies. Flea beetles from nearby canola fields descend upon the gardens to devour both buds and blooms on the daylilies, but this happens later in the summer when most lilies have finished blooming.

Climate issues have also dogged the gardens. Heavy rains, flooding and unseasonably late bouts of snow manifested themselves in the spring of 2004. Only a colossal salvage effort by a local group of Air Cadets and their parents staved off what could have been the end of the gardens.

During the summer of 2008, the entire site required re-grading to correct drainage issues and eliminate low-lying areas, which had resulted in the loss of various plants and trees and created breeding grounds for West Nile virus-carrying mosquitoes.





segments of the flower, called sepals. The corolla is composed of the petals that make up the remaining parts of the flower. Collectively, the calyx and corolla create the perianth, or what most would recognize as the petals.

The eye or eye zone is the darker tint surrounding the throat on both the petals and sepals. The centremost portion of the flower is called the throat. The terms diploid (meaning two) and tetraploid (meaning four) denote the number of sets of chromosomes contained within the plant. The higher the number of chromosomes, the larger and more beautiful, clear and vivid the blooms.

Depending on the species and cultivar, daylilies grow in all eleven of North America's plant hardiness zones. Cultivar prices range from a few dollars for popular varieties such as 'Stella D'Oro' to more than \$500 for rare collectible varieties.

The Beausejour Daylily Gardens have their own registered cultivar— 'Beausejour Angel's Reward,' a dark purple tetraploid cultivar with light purple midribs and a green throat. (A midrib is the principal lengthwise vein of a leaf or the petals and sepals of a flower).

Daylilies have been called the perfect perennial thanks to their showy blooms in a wide array of colours, drought and

heat-stress tolerance (once established), low maintenance and adaptability to a wide range of planting zones. Some cultivars also have a beautiful fragrance and will rebloom over the course of the season.

With over 600 daylily cultivars, Beausejour Daylily Gardens is elevating our perception of the ubiquitous ditch lily. Visit online at facebook.com/

beausejourdaylilygardens. For a list of other AHS and CHS accredited display gardens, visit daylilies.org/daylilies/ display-gardens (scroll down for search function).

Evelyn Lundeen is a writer and nursing instructor at Red River College in Winnipeg. She has a passionate love of gardening.