

# Quick Guide to Growing Daylilies

***Daylilies are one of America's all-time favorite perennials. These colorful beauties are surprisingly hardy and adaptable!***

The daylily is a plant that's easy to love. If you're looking for a carefree, dependable perennial, growing daylilies is the way to go! Their vibrant colors and lush foliage make them a perfect accent in just about any garden, and their hardy, vigorous, low-maintenance disposition makes them delightfully easy to grow. Often seen lining walkways or in borders, daylilies will grow and thrive in a variety of conditions and in just about any climate.



**Flowers:** Daylilies are true to their name; their individual flowers last for only a day. But they have many blooms per scape and many varieties flower profusely with blooms from early spring until frost. Daylily flowers come in a mindboggling variety of colors, shapes and sizes. Flowers may be circular, star-shaped, ruffled, flat, triangular, or trumpet shaped. The color spectrum covers almost every shade of the rainbow. Although to this date there are no true whites or true blues, the growers are getting close. Some varieties have bi- or tri-colored flowers and others have a kaleidoscope of varying colors and shades including spots, striping, colored tips or bands of contrasting color. Edges include straight, ruffles and teeth. Some varieties produce flowers that are very fragrant.

**Selecting Daylilies and Daylily Culture:** One of the reasons for the great progress in the modern daylily is that hybridizers and growers have been so generous with their knowledge. Likewise, we would like to share with you some of the things that we have learned throughout the years growing our favorite plants. However, what we have to say might or might not work for you in your particular area or with your philosophy of growing. These are the practices that have worked for us at WINDSONG NURSERY. This is not a recommendation or suggestion to follow these stated practices.

## ***Selecting daylilies - How do I pick?***

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder". Pick what makes you happy or fits into your garden or landscape design. So look for daylilies that have extended bloom seasons, great branching and bud count and nice foliage, and of course, if the bloom is fabulous.

**Dormancy** - One important factor to consider in selecting plants is their dormancy. The reaction of daylily foliage to cold weather is different between different varieties. Some varieties die down to the ground with freezing weather and stay below ground until enough sunny warm weather triggers their renewal of growth ("Dormant"). The other extreme are daylilies that remain in active growth and try to put up new foliage in the winter anytime there are temperatures above freezing ("Evergreen"). Somewhere in between are the semi-evergreen varieties that will continue growing in milder winters. Most Daylilies are native to the colder climates but there are many that are not adaptable. In the South evergreens varieties perform better than dormant varieties, because dormant varieties do not receive enough cold weather to promote the winter dormancy that they require to maintain health. We grow in Southern Indiana about one-third of each dormant, semi-evergreen and evergreen varieties to service each area.

## **Caring for your Daylilies**

**PREPARING A BED** - If there is good topsoil in the area where the bed is to be constructed; little needs to be done to change the soil except to remove rocks and roots. Soil is the basis for good plant growth. While daylilies will grow well in almost any soil, they perform best in soil that is high in organic matter, drains well and has a neutral pH (around 6.5).

For clay soil, start by raising the soil level a few inches (4 - 6 inches) to make a bed that will be well-drained. Add 2 - 3 inches of masonry sand and work this in as deep as possible with a tiller. Then add 2 - 3 inches of organic matter such as fine pine bark, peat moss, etc. and work this in. A tablespoon of slow release fertilizer such as Osmocote can be sprinkled in the hole when planting to give the plants a boost. This can be obtained at most garden centers. Keep in mind that most daylilies are tolerant of a wide range of soil conditions but three things they do not tolerate well are standing water, root competition, and lack of sunlight.

**PLANTING DAYLILIES** - The best time to plant daylilies is in spring or autumn, but if you buy container-grown plants you can plant them out any time during the growing season. Recommended planting distance is 18 to 24 inches apart. Planting daylilies should be done after preparing the soil as above or they should be planted in an existing bed. Daylilies may be received in two ways, bare root or in pots. Planting method is:

1. As soon as you get the plants, put their roots in a bucket of water to help them rehydrate a bit before planting (NOT the tops, though!). If necessary, they can live in water in a shady place for several days.
2. Daylilies (unless planted immediately after dividing with the dirt left on the roots) should have their tops clipped back by about 50% to offset the shock of losing feeder roots when they were dug.
3. Make a hole slightly larger than the spread of the roots.

4. Make a mound/cone of dirt in bottom of hole for roots to sit spread out being careful to make sure that the crown will be near the soil surface when the roots are covered two to three inches. **The biggest mistake made when planting is to plant them too deep.**
5. Pack the soil firmly using your hands around the roots and crown.
6. Use two to three inches of mulch to keep out weeds and to keep roots moist in dry, hot weather.
7. Keep it well watered for the first couple weeks until you see new growth starting.

#### **WATERING DAYLILIES:**

Water is essential for good daylily performance. If you do nothing else to your flower beds, provide at least 1 to 1-1/2 inches of water per week because daylilies benefit more from deep watering. This is more important than any feeding program. New plantings should be watered initially and continue weekly until established (6 – 8 weeks). Be careful not to over water.

**Fertilizing** - Fertilizing daylilies should be done once or twice per year after the plant is completely established in beds prepared as above. On established plants, two small fertilizer applications per year (spring and fall) are better than one large application. The best time to fertilize is in the early spring when the last freeze is past and in early fall not long after bloom season. Thus 10-10-10 or 6-6-6- fertilizing programs are recommended. You may also use some slow release fertilizers such as "Osmocote" and "Nutracote".

**Application:** Place the fertilizer in a ring around the plant about 6" from the outside of the plant. Water the beds for about 30 minutes immediately after fertilizer application to get the Nitrogen (N) portion of the fertilizer into the soil. If left on top of the soil it will evaporate into the air. The best bet is to go to a knowledgeable person in a garden center or farmers supply and get them to help determine what is needed. Top amendments will be slower to transfer into the soil and could be lost with soil movement due to washing. If the bed is mulched, nutrients are better protected from movement while they are being leached into the soil. Also if there is heavy earthworm activity in a bed this will help move nutrients down into the root zone of the plants.

In the North following bloom season with the first cool weather in the early fall, was the second very serious feeding period. It's important not to use a time-release fertilizer at this time, as you want rapid growth to end before the onset of very cold weather. This second feeding period can result in twice the plant the following year as compared to unfed plants. In the South, you can't feed too much in the summer due to the excessive heat, so most of the feeding takes place from November through March.

#### **Using liquid fertilizer:**

I've found liquid feeding modest amounts of plant food very often to work wonders. It's also important to vary the product applied. A Peter's Excel product known as Cal Mag 15-5-15 seems to make my plants very happy. (A lab test will also tell you if the important balance of Calcium and Magnesium is present.) I liquid feed any number of other products, most with a very high first number (Nitrogen).

**DAYLILY INSECT AND FUNGAL PEST CONTROL** - First let us say that the best way to control insect and fungal pests is to keep daylilies growing at an optimum. Well drained soil, raised beds with lots of organic matter, proper fertility, lots of water, and plenty of sunlight and air circulation will ensure that they do their best. Our major daylily pests are aphids (an almost microscopic soft bodied sucking insect), thrips (scrapes the plant tissue and then sucks up the sap-also nearly microscopic), spider mites (a type of arachnid which damages plant tissue and then sucks the sap), snails and slugs. There are several systemics we have used such as Cygon, Marathon and Merit. Sometimes in the spring we will have a severe attack of aphids before any predators are present and when growing conditions prevent the daylilies from outgrowing the damage. When this occurs we will usually treat with a combination of Malathion and dormant oil to kill the aphids and their eggs. Thrips on daylilies do mostly cosmetic damage that is prevented by treating with a systemic pesticide as mentioned above. Spider mite damage is also cosmetic in this area and can be controlled generally by adequate moisture. Snails and slugs cause damage to foliage and to the flower scape but are not fatal to the plant.

**GROOMING AND SANITATION** - We follow several practices to keep our daylilies attractive and healthy. In the spring, dead foliage and debris should be cleared away from around your daylilies. During the growing season, damaged or diseased foliage should be removed. Remove spent blooms and seed heads after flowering to keep your plants neat looking and to encourage re-bloom.

**DAYLILY WEED CONTROL**- The most effective weed control measures for the home garden are mulching, pre emergences and hoeing. Controlling weeds in daylilies should be done to prevent the daylilies from having to compete for food, water and light thereby giving them a chance to do their best.

- 1) Use Pre-emergence herbicides to prevent weeds from emerging from the ground. Applying herbicides must be done before the weeds emerge because they will have no effect on weeds that have already germinated. Apply them twice a year, in late winter before summer weeds have germinated and in mid-summer to carry the protection into winter. Generally the activity lasts about 3 to 4 months. Trade names of products we have used for this purpose are Surflan, Treflan, Snapshot, and Preen. Most of these are available at some garden centers, farm supply stores and your farmer's co-op.
- 2) Use hand weeding in proximity to the plant itself where needed.

**Dividing Daylilies:** Division is not essential, but it can result in better flowering if the plants have become crowded and overgrown usually every 3 – 5 yrs.

*This article was composed by A WINDSONG NURSERY from many different sources all over the country combined with our personal experiences to create a guide for new Daylily enthusiasts. Written by Warren & Kimber Wolfe*