PLANT LIFE COLUMN

DAYLILIES

Daylilies provide summer color in hot sunny landscapes during the summer. These easy care plants tolerate our heat, survive dry weather and are easy to grow. Try them in your landscape for a beautiful, low care plant.

I remember gold colored daylilies from my grandmother's garden in Ft. Myers. Hybridizers, plant breeders who try to create new flower colors, have developed a wide selection of colors. Now you can select from nearly white to almost black and everything in between. Popular colors are yellow, melon, pink, orange, red, purple and burgundy. Some blossoms are single tubes; others are double or triple layers of petals. Some have dark or light colored patterns on them making them even more distinctive.

Though individual flowers only open for a day, a sequence of blooms lasting for weeks make mass plantings of several different varieties of daylilies spectacular throughout the summer.

Few plants rival the adaptability of daylilies. While they will tolerate moderate, broken shade, such as that found under pines, most varieties bloom best in full sun. If you have a partly shady spot, try darker varieties with red or purple flowers. These perform better in reduced sun. A bright sunny location brings out the best color in yellow, pinks and the pastel varieties. Buy plants in bloom so you can actually see the flower color before purchase.

Daylilies are promoted by water conscious gardeners as they make a very drought tolerant ground cover. They are tough in dry times but bloom best with uniform moisture. Soak the ground to wet the roots deeply (8-12") no more than once per week.

Just as there is tremendous selection of colors, plants grow in a variety of heights, from small leaf dwarfs which are ideal for borders to yard tall plants suited for foundation planting, and background plants for flower beds.

Daylilies may be grown from seeds but most gardeners purchase potted plants that can be set out any time of year. Neighbors frequently share plants produced by division of the clumping-forming plants. Growing daylily seedlings can be a rewarding hobby and challenges hybridizers to develop new color patterns and flower shapes. Nearly twenty different terms have developed to describe the various shapes, colors and forms produced through pollination crosses.

The best time to divide daylilies is after they finish blooming in late summer or early fall. Dig the clump and gently shake or wash soil from the roots so individual fans of leaves can be identified. Cut leaves back to about 6 to 8 inches above the crown and cut the clump with a sharp knife. Sometimes gentle pulling will be adequate to separate smaller clumps. Cut away any damaged roots.

Daylilies will grow in sand, muck or clay and may be planted in beds of amended soil. Add 3" to 4" of compost or peat for increasing the water holding capacity of our well drained sandy soil. Sprinkle 2 to 3 lb of fertilizer over a 100 square foot area before tilling to loosen the soil.

Plant daylilies in a larger hole. Add soil in a mound in the center of the hole and spread roots over and around the mound before adding soil. Plant at the same depth as they were growing so the crown is not buried.

Small plants called proliferations may form on the flower stalk. These are another source of plants identical to the parent. Cut the stem several inches below the growth and plant so the base of the leafy sprig is in the soil.
Water new plants frequently until roots are established, then cut back to no more than weekly.

Daylilies do not have demanding fertilizer requirements but will benefit from 3 applications of a general purpose fertilizer in early spring, mid-summer and fall. If using a 6-6-6, use about 2½ lb per 100 square feet (10' by 10' of planting bed).

Mulch around clumps with a 2” to 3” thick layer of leaves or pine needles to reduce weeds and moderate soil temperatures. Keep it several inches from the base to avoid rot during our rainy summer. Decomposing mulch helps with long term improvement of sandy soils.

Daylilies are tough plants for Central Florida landscapes. Plant several different varieties for color throughout the summer.

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