

America is rediscovering the daylily Gardening: An occupation for just about all seasons

Flowering perennials are back in vogue, reintroducing a special sense of style and color that once was the hallmark of American gardens. Riding high on this wave of renewed interest are daylilies, the most colorful and versatile perennials of all.

Daylilies are old-fashioned flowers with a contemporary new look. Once limited to orange or yellow, the blossoms now come in pink, purple, red, peach, apricot and all shades in between, including exciting color combinations.

In addition to classic starlike daylilies, there are lots of new shapes and sizes, ranging from spidery blooms a full 12 inches wide to biscuit-shaped miniatures barely two inches across.

Petals of these modern varieties may be ruffled, twisted or flecked with eye-catching glitter known as diamond dust.

The plants can rise to a height of four feet or remain as short as 12 inches. Tall varieties make wonderful additions to traditional perennial borders, while low-growing types serve as vibrant ground covers and edgings. When planted in naturalistic clusters in lawns, daylilies spread like wild flowers.

Botanists know the daylily as Hemerocallis, meaning "beauty for a day." Individual blooms open and fade the very same day, but individual plants continue to blossom for weeks.

With the introduction of early, mid-season and late-flowering varieties, gardeners can enjoy continuous color from spring into autumn.

According to Jack Roberson, one of the world's foremost daylily hybridizers, daylilies flourish with little care in almost every part of the country. He suggests planting the tuberlike roots in spring or fall, preferably in spots receiving at least six hours of direct sunlight daily.

"The plants are not fussy about soil," said Roberson, who is also president of American Daylily and Perennials, a mail-order nursery based in Grain Valley, Missouri, "although a well-drained loam suits them best." If soil is heavy, he recommends mixing in some peat moss or compost at planting time.

It is essential that daylilies not be planted too deep. After spading the earth



DAYLILIES, America's hardest and most versatile perennial.

to a depth of one foot, fashion a cone out of the loosened soil near ground level. Spread the roots of a single clump over the cone, covering them with about two inches of soil and then watering thoroughly.

Jack Roberson, whose "Mormon" hybrid was cited by the American Hemerocallis Society as one of the outstanding daylilies of 1986, has a special tip on landscaping.

"Whenever I plant daylilies in masses of 25 or more per bed, I space the roots 12 to 15 inches apart," he said. "But when I want a colorful garden accent, I plant in groups of three or five, leaving just six inches between roots."

Freshly planted roots should be kept moist for the first month. Although established daylilies are drought-resistant, they perform best if watered whenever

soil becomes dry. Wait at least four to six weeks before fertilizing new plants. Then begin feeding with a low-nitrogen fertilizer, using half the amount recommended on the label. Apply only in spring and fall, when temperatures are cool.

Little ongoing care is required. Unlike with many other tuberous plants, daylily roots are extremely hardy and do not need to be dug and stored for winter. Every few years, the plants become root bound and should be divided.

Dig up overgrown clumps in spring or fall. After shaking off any loose dirt, separate each clump into individual plants by hand or with a knife. The divisions can be replanted, with extras going to friends and neighbors.

For gardeners who think there may be a time limit on the gardening season, the National Gardening Association experts have ideas on how to continue gardening, despite colder temperatures.

The National Gardening Association, based in Burlington, Vermont, has researched a coldframe/hotframe "Greenbox" to help start extra-early spring crops, and extend gardens and harvests through fall and winter.

"NGA experts have developed a plan for this Greenbox with details on the construction and use of the coldframe. This special 'Greenbox' can extend either end of the gardening season and, as well, serve in summer's heat as a food dryer," said Charles Scott, president of the non-profit, 250,000 member-supported National Gardening Association.

"We know gardeners need the best help and information to keep crops growing, so we compiled months of research to develop our Greenbox coldframe.

"Besides extending the growing season, this special Greenbox can help preserve fruits and vegetables for winter," Scott continued.

"Our NGA Greenbox plan shows gardeners how to construct the coldframe

and use it to garden in many seasons. In addition, the Greenbox can serve to dehydrate garden produce as it converts easily into a food dehydrator in summer, so it's useful every month of the year," Scott said.

A special feature in *National Gardening* magazine explains how to use the coldframe as a food dryer. First, cover the soil in the Greenbox and the interior front and back walls with black plastic. Then, replace sides with two pieces of plywood into which holes are drilled at ground level to provide air circulation.

Inside the Greenbox, window screens can be inserted (supported on either clay or plastic pots) to use as food drying trays. When the sunlight heats the interior, fresh air is pulled in through the holes at ground level. This air heats and flows out through the vented Greenbox lid/door.

"We found the Greenbox to be invaluable to serious gardeners," said Scott.

For a sample copy of the *National Gardening* magazine featuring the Greenbox and the special plan, send \$1 to cover postage and handling to National Gardening, 180 AJ Flynn Avenue, Burlington, VT 05401.

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