

Daylily Basics

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Daylilies belong to the genus *Hemerocallis*, a word derived from two Greek words meaning “beauty” and “day,” a reference to the fact that each flower lasts only a single day. The daylily is a hardy perennial; one plant may live for years. Daylilies are among the easiest perennials to grow, typically blooming in early summer. Although each flower lasts only one day, a typical plant will have many buds on each scape (stem) and will produce several scapes during the blooming season. The blooms themselves come in many shapes and colors.

Where and how should a daylily be planted?

Daylilies thrive in locations receiving six hours of sun each day. A bit of shade is fine and, in fact, may be an advantage during Houston’s hot summer afternoons.

They will grow in most soil types, with a fairly wide pH range, but they will do best in a rich humus soil that is either neutral or slightly acid (pH of 5.5–7). Be certain the location has good drainage and that the daylily won’t have to compete with roots of larger plants, such as shrubs or trees.

A daylily can be planted at any time in Houston, although it may be best to avoid planting during the hot summer, when the plant not only must become established but also has to cope with intense heat. After working up the soil, dig a 12-inch hole. Make a mound of soil in the center of the hold and spread the daylily roots over the mound. Cover the roots with soil up to but not above the crown of the plant, working the soil around and between the roots. Firm the soil and water well. Prune the foliage back to a length of 6–8 inches. Mulch well.

Individual plants should be placed about 18 inches apart.

Daylilies need about 1 inch of water per week, especially during hotter months. Fertilize in moderation with a balanced formula (13-13-13) at least twice a year (spring and fall).

What diseases and pests should I expect with daylilies?

Daylilies that have good drainage, good soil and good aeration usually exhibit no problems at all. Occasionally, daylilies may be bothered by **aphids, spider mites, thrips, slugs and snails**. When determining the best course of action for these pests, it is important first to determine the source of the problem. Choose the least toxic control method first. Aphid populations can be knocked off with a strong stream of water. If insects are present in threatening numbers and a spray seems necessary, try horticultural soap or citrus oil spray. If a stronger insecticide becomes necessary, carbaryl (Sevin) may help.

Crown rot can be caused by excess watering. **Daylily rust** may occur but normally doesn’t kill a daylily. **Leaf streak** makes foliage unattractive; overhead watering will spread the disease.

What do all those symbols on the tag mean?

Bloom season

The peak bloom season in the Houston area is generally considered to be May. Daylily cultivars may be marked to indicate

EE = Extra early (more than 2–4 weeks before peak)

E = Early (2–4 weeks before peak)

EM = Early to mid-season (1–2 weeks before peak)

M = Peak

ML = Mid to late (1–2 weeks after peak)

L = Late (2–4 weeks after peak)

VL = Very late (more than 2–4 weeks after peak)

Re = Will bloom AGAIN after the first bloom. This is considered to be a real plus!

• *Height* of fans and scapes. This is measured in inches. Example: A plant marked 24" 4.5" would have fans reaching 24 inches high, with blooms that are 4½ inches across.

• *Ploidy*. Modern daylilies are either diploid or tetraploid, a characteristic that refers to the number of sets of chromosomes per cell in a plant.

Dip = The daylily has 22 chromosomes.

Tet = The daylily has 44 chromosomes. In general, "Tets" are larger plants, having larger flowers, with better substance.

• *Foliage habit*

Dor = Dormant, the foliage dies back during winter months.

Sev = Semi-evergreen, a fair amount of the foliage dies back during the winter.

Ev = Evergreen, the foliage stays green all winter.

In general, "Sev" and "Ev" do better here in Houston, because we do not have the severe winters of the Northern States.

• *Hybridizer*. The name of the creator and the year in which the daylily variety was created. "Salter 96" would indicate that Elizabeth Salter had hybridized the daylily in 1996.

• *Other symbols and data*

Fra = Many daylilies have no fragrance: however some have a wonderful scent!

SPLENDID TOUCH = Daylily name

What are the flower forms and color patterns?

Details are far too numerous to list here. However, the basics are:

single = the flower has 3 petals and 3 sepals

double = more petals and sepals, w/blooms which vary from slightly double to peony-like

spider = petals and sepals are narrow throughout their length

self = petals and sepals are the same color

bicolor = petals and sepals are of totally different colors

eye zone = a different or darker colored band on both petals and sepals where they join at the throat

What is the significance of a "medal" in daylily descriptions?

The **Award of Merit** is given annually to the 10 cultivars receiving the most votes by AHS awards and honor judges from at least half of the daylily-growing regions. It represents outstanding beauty and performance over a wide area of the United States.

The **Stout Silver Medal** is the highest award a cultivar can receive. Only one is given each year.

Are daylilies very expensive? Where can I buy more?

Daylilies may cost as little as \$4.99 at some large garden centers or more than \$100 for recently introduced varieties.

Daylilies are available at local nurseries. Good buys may be available from local growers and at club sales (see below). An Internet search can also yield many growers who will be happy to mail color catalogues and ship your selections to you.

Where can I find out more about daylilies?

- Printed publications:

Daylilies, The Perfect Perennial, Lewis and Nancy Hill

The Daylily, A guide for Gardeners, John P. Peat and Ted L. Petit

The Color Encyclopedia of Daylilies, John P. Peat and Ted L. Petit

- Internet sites offer a wealth of information. Here are two:

www.ofts.com/bill/daylily.html

www.daylilies.org/daylilies.html

- Local daylily clubs:

Houston Area Daylily Society

Cypress Creek Daylily Club

Lone Star Daylily Society

www.lonestardaylilysociety.org

Houston Hemerocallis Society

www.ofts.com/hhs/meetings.html

Are there any warnings about growing daylilies?

YES! Don't be surprised if you become addicted to these lovely plants! For the small amount of effort expended, you will be rewarded by real beauty in your garden!



Gardening fact sheets are distributed by Harris County Master Gardeners, community volunteers trained in basic horticulture by Texas Cooperative Extension. For information about Master Gardener volunteer training classes, call Harris County Cooperative Extension at 281.855.5600, or send an e-mail to harris@ag.tamu.edu.