DAYLILIES - THE PERFECT PERENNIAL

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The daylily offers many different choices for the landscaping or garden at your home. The scientific name of this perennial plant is hemerocallis. A cultivar is a registered named daylily. There are over 75,000 different registered cultivars. This large number covers cultivars registered from the beginning of record keeping to the present, so many of these cultivars are old and some even lost. Every year hybridizers introduce new cultivars. In the last ten years there have been around 2,200 new daylilies registered annually. The changes in daylilies over the last several years have been dramatic in plant sizes, flower sizes, flower colors, and flower shapes. Every year new cultivars add to the interest in daylilies. This variety gives buyers many options to choose from for their gardens.

In our area, daylilies will bloom from June through September, but the peak bloom time is the end of June until the third week in July. There are also early daylilies that bloom in June and many late bloomers that extend the season through August and September. Planting all three types of blooming time daylilies will provide blooms all summer long. Take a visit during peak season to a display garden and get familiar with the cultivars in which you are interested. By visiting a display garden in your region, you can see how well cultivars perform in your area. Observing daylilies in your growing area will assure the cultivars you choose are hardy and will perform well in your garden compared to buying from a catalog or buying shipped-in plants from other regions.

Daylilies have many unique characteristics. The daylily bloom comes in all colors except solid white and blue. However, many newer complex cultivars do have white and blue within the bloom. Various ranges of color in yellow, red, pink, purple, and melon are found in the daylily. The bloom can be a solid color or a combination of colors, and many are complex with patterns and ragged edges called teeth. Some daylilies have tiny crystals on their cells that reflect light giving them a sparkling or glistening appearance and a gold, silver or diamond dusting. The part of the plant the holds the blooms is called the scape and sizes can vary from a few inches to over five feet. Different hybridizers have been working on these visual effects that really add to the interest of the cultivar types.

Flower form is another interesting feature of the daylily, and there is great diversity from one cultivar to another. Most are single blooms with three petals and three sepals, but they can also be double blooms. Bloom size is another feature to consider. Blooms are broken into three size ranges: miniature under 3 inches, small 3 to 4 ½ inches, and large over 4 ½ inches. There are many large bloom sizes that are over 10 inches. Foliage can also vary considerably from grass-like leaves to thick corn-like leaves. The length of the leaves also can vary from as little as 6 inches to over 36 inches. Daylilies should be planted where they get at least six hours of sun daily. Keep them watered for the best bloom.

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The American Hemerocallis Society (www.daylilies.org) is the governing body for the perennial daylily. From its web site you can gain information about the different cultivars. There is also a database with all registered daylilies, giving details and pictures of the blooms. Perhaps the best way to determine which type of daylily you like is to visit an American Hemerocallis Society Display Garden. By looking on the web site, you will find many within a reasonable distance from where you live. Display gardens are both public and privately-owned collections. All display gardens welcome visitors and offer them the chance to see several hundred wonderful newer cultivars that are not available at commercial nurseries and other retail markets. You might even want to join the American Hemerocallis Society; it is inexpensive and you will receive its magazine with lots of current research and information to make growing daylilies all the more fun and successful. There are daylily clubs within each region, and all of them have daylily sales giving you a chance to purchase modern daylilies at reasonable prices.

With peak blooming time for daylilies fast approaching, take my suggestion and visit a local Region Display Garden to see what is available for you to enjoy in your own garden or landscaping. For more information, check out the website (www.daylilies.org) to find display gardens in your area. Come visit.

For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit : http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.
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