

Daylilies

If you're looking for a low maintenance perennial to plant this fall, with continuous colorful summer blooms, look no further than the daylily. A September planting of daylilies, with proper care, will allow the plant to root and bud, resulting in vibrant flowers the following summer. The classic look of daylilies has adorned roadsides for years with its typically orange or yellow flowers. Hybridization of this rugged perennial has improved size, color and flowering ability. *Hemerocallis*, the botanical name for daylilies, means "beautiful for a day." As the name suggests, individual blooms last for only one day, but new buds open and blooming is continuous for weeks.

Daylilies can be used for massing along borders, on banks for erosion control, or if you have a special variety, as specimen plants exhibiting their unique qualities of color and size. Daylily plants have long slender bright green leaves that arch to the ground. Flowers form at the tip of flower stalks, which arise from the center of the foliage. Each stalk has numerous buds that open at different times. One daylily can produce as many as 200 to 400 flowers per season and remain in bloom for about 30 days. Flower size, shape and color vary greatly. Petals may have ruffled or crinkled edges, or be shaped like trumpets or bells. Some varieties are self-cleaning but most benefit from deadheading. Bloom time can vary from June to August.

One of the reasons daylilies have persisted in gardens across the country is their easy maintenance and drought tolerance. These plants can survive in many adverse weather conditions and are mostly trouble free, lasting many years if undisturbed. Insect control is usually not necessary and daylily diseases are rare. Daylilies grow best in full sun—at least 6 hours. The daylily is adaptable to most Kansas soils, and not too particular about soil type. It is best not to plant daylilies too close to trees or large shrubs where they compete for moisture or nutrients. Fertilize daylilies annually with a light application of nitrogen after plants enter dormancy in the fall and/or early spring when new growth emerges. Fall fertilization is especially helpful because during the fall the roots of the daylily remain active and are forming flowers for the following year. Excessive fertilization may result in over-growth of foliage and sparse blooming. Removing seed pods and stalks at the end of the season will prevent seedling plants from coming up in the bed and will insure good flowering the following year.

Before planting, prepare the daylily bed by working the soil 6 to 8 inches deep and incorporating 2 inches of organic matter such as compost or well-rotted manure. Dig the planting hole deep enough to accommodate the roots without bending or breaking them. Cut the foliage back to 5 or 6 inches in

length. Place the plant so the crown (where the stem and roots meet) is no deeper than 1 inch below the soil line. Firm the soil around the base of the plant and water it in thoroughly.

Planting several daylilies of the same variety in one area can create a stunning visual impact—especially from a distance. This may be ideal for the bed in the farthest part of your yard, or in your front bed if the road is a substantial distance from your home. For beds that are more often viewed up close, like those near your entrance, plant just a few daylilies but select those that are more known for their flowers. These specimens will encourage visitors (even if that visitor is you) to stop and enjoy each flower.

If you already have daylilies in your garden, fall is also the perfect time to divide your plants for more vigorous blooming. Daylilies should be divided every 2 to 5 years, although they often reach peak blooming in their third year. When dividing, cut around the entire plant with a sharp flat shovel and lift the clumps out of the ground with a gardening fork. Using a garden fork will cause less damage to the roots and leave much of the excess soil. Wash or brush off any soil left on the roots and cut the plant into sections. Each division or section should have about three strong fans or crowns. Cut tops back to 6 inches on large growing plants and 3 inches on dwarf plants. Trim broken or damaged roots or tops and reset plants as described in the planting section.

Daylilies are the perfect perennial for anyone who wants an abundance of flowers with infrequent maintenance. With proper site selection and care daylilies can be a bright pop of color for you to enjoy for years to come.