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Daylilies are often called the “perfect perennial” due to their brilliant colors and ability to thrive in many different climate zones

Pretty, plentiful and worry-free

Daylilies are great plants for the beginning gardener



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Ask a Master Gardener

Question: I want color in my garden this summer, but don't have much free time. What flower can I plant that is pretty, comes back year after year and is easy to take care of?

AnsWER: Daylilies are wonderful plants for the beginning or busy gardener because they are relatively maintenance-free. Daylilies are not true lilies (genus *Lilium*). They belong to the genus *Hermerocallis*, from the Greek words meaning “day” and “beauty” or “beautiful for a day.” That’s right — each blossom typically lasts no more than a day. However, each plant produces an abundance of buds, so the total blooming time of a well-established clump may be 30 to 40 days.

Thanks to plant breeders, daylilies have come a long way from the roadside “ditch lily” and are now often called the “perfect perennial” due to their

brilliant colors and ability to thrive in many different climate zones. For optimal growth, daylilies prefer slightly acidic (pH 6 to 6.5), well-drained soil with plenty of organic matter.

Daylilies are tolerant of full sun or light shade but need at least six hours of direct sun for best results. They do not require fertilizer, but optimal growth can be achieved when lightly fertilized with moderate nitrogen and higher rates of phosphorous and potash. Slow-release fertilizers are the best for daylilies. They also make an excellent ground cover on slopes because their roots hold against erosion once established.

Daylilies offer spectacular flowers, are prolific bloomers and are relatively free of pests. Attractive flowers vary in form and color thanks to intensive hybridization. The wide assortment of bloom colors including white, yellow, orange, pink, red and purple are a



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRED ALLEY

Daylilies offer a wide assortment of colors, including white, yellow, orange, pink, red and purple

visual delight outdoors or as cut flowers. There are midget, dwarf, intermediate and tall forms ranging from 1 to 4 feet tall.

The flowers of *Hermerocallis citrina* are edible and used in Chinese cuisine for hot and sour soup, daylily soup and moo shu pork.

The best time to plant daylilies is during early fall or early spring when

soil temperatures are moderate. Planted daylilies should be spaced 18- to 24-inches apart. The plant should set so that the crown is no deeper than 1 inch below the surface of the soil. Although daylilies generally don't need to be pampered, an adequate supply of water will ensure peak performance, especially the first year after planting.



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In early spring, before growth starts, remove the dead leaves from the previous year's growth and remove dead flowers — called deadheading. Division every three to five years may revitalize flowering in plants that have become too crowded. Aphids are the most serious pest of daylilies and can be controlled with insecticidal soaps or a repeated strong spray of water.

Try planting a mix of early, mid- and late-season bloomers to enjoy all

summer long. Depending on the cultivar, daylilies will bloom from May through late September. You can extend the season by planting selections that will re-bloom giving you delightful color with little maintenance and much enjoyment in your garden.

Do you have a gardening question? Email, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461, or 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.