

# Daylily Magic

By Kathy Wolfe  
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## Everything old is new again

If daylilies conjure up a vision of an old-fashioned grandma's garden, you might not be aware of the exciting newer hybrids that have been introduced since the orange-shaded, trumpet-flowered originals. Daylilies are a perennial plant whose name alludes to the fact that each flower lasts but one day, opening in early morning and withering by evening. Some daylilies are nocturnal, bloom in the evening, but still only last one day. The plant originated in eastern Asia, traveled to Europe over the Silk Road and was brought to North America by the Pilgrims as a treasured possession. In the early 1800's settlers brought their plants west with them and soon the hardy daylilies became naturalized.

What is the difference between a lily and a daylily? Although their blooms are similarly shaped and generally bloom in high summer, lilies are in the genus *Lilium* and are considered a true lily, while daylilies are of the genus *Hemerocallis*, from the Greek word "beautiful". Other differences include:

Lilies grow on underground bulbs and daylilies grow on thickened, fibrous roots where they store food and water.

Lily flowers are spaced individually along a central, tall stalk and blossoms form on top of the stalk. Daylilies have long, strap-like leaves that arch and fan from a central crown at ground level.

Lilies do best in full sun (6+ hours of direct sun each day), but daylilies can thrive in full sun or part sun (4-6 hours of direct sun each day).

Lilies prefer rich, well-drained soil while daylilies are quite soil tolerant and can grow in moist or dry conditions once established.

Lily bulbs can be toxic to humans and animals if ingested, but daylilies do not have these harmful properties.

Lilies should be divided every 3-5 years, but daylilies can remain in place much longer until they get crowded and blooms become less prolific.

Over 80,000 varieties of daylilies have been registered since the early 1900s. In the 1930s, efforts began in the U.S. and England to develop improvements. Most modern hybrids descended from two types of daylily, the lemon yellow *Hemerocallis flava* and the familiar orange *Hemerocallis fulva*.



A Big Fuss Daylily with Peach Foxglove. *Photo by Marilyn Glenn / WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardener.*



Today's modern hybrids offer a wider range in color, pattern, size and reduced sun fading. Thicker, stronger flowers were developed to reduce weather damage and shorter stalks that sit just above the foliage improved the proportion of the overall look. Higher bud counts resulted in longer bloom times, and continuous or reblooming varieties were bred with more attractive and pest resistant foliage. Winter hardiness improved and gardeners in northern regions can now find daylilies suited to their climate zones. These improvements led to increased desirability and a new interest in this old favorite.

Daylilies are easy to plant and maintain. Choose a sunny or partly sunny location for best bloom. Soak roots for 2-3 hours before planting. While they will tolerate a wide range of soil conditions, they do best in well-drained soil, planted 1-1/2 – 2 feet apart. Plant the crown no more than 1" deep and water well during bloom time and especially in the first year so the roots can get established. To encourage reblooming you can remove the seed capsules as they form, much like the deadheading of other perennials. Divide crowded daylilies in the fall after blooming, usually in September, to allow new plants to get a good start before winter weather arrives.

One of the best ways to see new hybrid daylilies is to visit a local nursery or display garden. The Whatcom County master gardeners are planning a Daylily Bloom Exhibit on two consecutive Sundays, July 18 and July 25, from noon – 2 p.m. at their display garden at Hovander Homestead Park in Ferndale. They exhibit a hundred or more blooms in their garden area and from samples brought in by local area growers. Whatcom County master gardeners will be there to answer your daylily questions. Be sure to check their website closer to the date to confirm event details.

Remember: Do not think of daylilies as old-fashioned. Think of them as timeless beauties that have only improved with age.

## **RESOURCES:**

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