



Hemerocallis (daylily) Culture and Care

Soils and Planting, Water and Fertilizer, Sunlight, Mulch, Disease & Pests, Mail Order Plants

SOILS AND PLANTING

Daylilies are generally one of the most durable and forgiving perennials available on the market today. They do, however, respond best to well-drained soils with a pH of around 6.3 to 6.8 (slightly acidic). Where soils are too acidic, amending the soil with lime produces results at a low expense. Alkaline soils may be treated with peat moss and other organic matter to lower pH. Where soils are particularly difficult, contact your local, county or state agricultural extension office for assistance—they are there to help.

The best time to transplant and divide daylilies is just after flowering, usually late July into August in Wisconsin. At this time daylilies are naturally in a growth cycle that produces new growth and roots. Transplants in spring will often produce plants that do not flower well during their first summer and look rather poor until later in the season. Planting in fall (September or after) in the northern tier is problematic, since there is little growing season left for the plants to make new roots and establish. In Wisconsin, mid-August often is one of the best growing periods for new transplants due to cooling night temperatures and more abundant moisture—perfect for growth!

Many people go to great pains to create optimum soil mixtures for daylilies, but this is usually not necessary. A good garden soil, which generally drains well, is all that is needed.

Northeast Wisconsin has heavy clay soils which do not drain well, but even with these conditions daylilies thrive with little or no added attention to the soil. People who garden in heavy clay soils, however, are well aware of the extra work that such soils create for planting, dividing and transplanting daylilies. The work load over the years can be considerably reduced by first amending the soil with an inert material such as perlite and/or with copious amounts of organic matter (peat, bark, leaves, composted manure).

Organic matter in garden soil can be quite beneficial for daylilies and other plants. Positive soil characteristics of organic matter are: additional water holding capacity, improvement of aeration/infiltration, increased soil friability, additional nutrients, and easier cultivation. Most sources of organic matter are relatively equal in their properties for soil improvement, once composted.

Daylilies should be planted two to three feet apart, so at least three years of growth can be accommodated comfortably. Loosen soil in the garden to a depth of approximately twelve inches and create a hole that will comfortably hold the roots of the daylily. Many growers build a mound in the bottom of the hole on which the center of the plant will sit and from which the roots fall gently away. The crown of the plant (where stem meets the roots) should be planted no deeper than 1 to 2 inches below the surface. If planted

too deep the plants may rot or later not flower properly. Firm the soil around newly planted daylilies and water thoroughly.

WATER AND FERTILIZER

Daylilies are sturdy plants which can tolerate drought conditions very well. They do not like to be wet for prolonged periods, however. If daylilies are planted in a very dry location or rain is lacking they will benefit from watering. Many growers supply extra water during bloom season as this enhances flower size, scape strength and the overall appearance of the plant.

Fertilizing daylilies has been a somewhat controversial subject and remains somewhat unclear. Gardeners do know that they respond positively to fertilizer applications. Recently, studies on this subject point to the use of high nitrogen fertilizers producing the most benefit overall. Some growers have reported no ill effects from frequent applications of high nitrogen fertilizers, even just before flowering. To remain safe, we recommend fertilizing one time up to 4 weeks before blooming and one time in late summer (withhold fertilizers in fall so that plants slow their growth and harden off for winter). Applications of water-soluble fertilizer may be sprayed directly on to plants or granules can be spread around the plants. Many growers use time-release fertilizers, such as Osmocote™, with excellent results. Milorganite™ has also proven effective and is an inexpensive fertilizer that may repel deer and other animals from the garden. Application rates should follow the manufacturer's recommendations. Soil tests are always beneficial in making decisions and your local agricultural extension office would be glad to help.

SUNLIGHT

Daylilies love sun. A minimum of six hours of full sun is needed for proper growth and flowering. Some cultivars do better with more or less sun. Protection from mid and late afternoon sun, if possible, will help flower color to remain more consistent. Flowers which withstand the sun's heat are said to be "sun fast." Almost all light-colored flowers perform quite well in this area, while red and purple daylilies are particularly susceptible to color change (melting) from the heat of the sun.

MULCH

Mulching daylilies is not usually necessary, but it is recommended for plants going through their first winter after planting. Some evergreen and semi-evergreen varieties may require mulching every year due to marginal hardiness in Wisconsin. Daylilies respond well to mulched flower beds as the cover provided helps retain needed moisture during dry seasons. An added benefit is weed control.

DISEASE AND PESTS

Disease is seldom a problem with daylilies, although fungal and bacterial infections can be bothersome if weather conditions are right. The greatest enemy of this hardy perennial is overly wet conditions that weaken the plant to the previously mentioned pathogens. The cure is prevention; plant daylilies in well-drained soils whenever possible. A number of commercial products are widely available if infections do occur. In most cases the daylilies survive the infection, with only partial loss of the plant, and they out-grow the problem with no lingering effects. If you feel it is necessary to treat your plants with a chemical for bacterial or fungal infection, please consult your local agricultural agent.

A disease called daylily rust showed up in gardens around the world in 2000. The disease manifests itself as orange/yellow powdery spores that destroy leaf tissue of the daylily plant. Daylily rust has a complex life cycle and much information is yet to be gathered. It does appear that conditions in the southern part of the United States are more conducive to its reproductive cycle. Many gardens in the northern tier of

U.S., which reported rust in 2001, found no rust in the summer of 2002 and in subsequent years. Studies have recently found that daylily rust does not typically survive winters in USDA Plant Hardiness Zones 5 and lower. The [Daylily Rust Dictionary](#) page, found on the American Daylily Society's website is an excellent resource for information and links to other sites concerning this disease.

Hemerocallis leaf streak can be problematic during wet springs which are followed by warmer drier weather. The disease is characterized by browning and yellowing leaf tissue at the center lines of the leaves, expanding as the leaves get older. While it can be unsightly, little long term health problems are noticed. Some years this disease can be more common and other years completely absent. Removal of older leaves with disease expression is recommended to make plants look better. Soon enough new foliage replaces older leaves that are unsightly.

A number of animal pests can and do like daylilies. The most problematic for gardeners in Northeast Wisconsin are thrips (particularly during years with warm winters and dry springs). These little insects are seldom seen, but can cause bud damage during early scape formation. The injured buds grow into flowers with color distortions, small bumps, and sometimes deformed petals and sepals. Dark colored flowers, such as reds and purples, are often most drastically influenced (due to the way pigments are carried in the flowers). Fortunately, thrips seem to do little damage to the overall health of the plant. A spray mixture of Avid™ and Orthene™ is very effective in combating thrips, if sprayed on plants in the spring when they are approximately six inches tall. Avid™ is very expensive, and must be purchased in a quantity which most gardeners would not use in a lifetime. Once again, we recommend contacting a local agriculture agent to find a product that is more economically feasible, unless you have fields of daylilies. Old leaves and plant material in the garden are suspected of helping thrips to overwinter. We have noticed a marked difference in gardens which are cleaned of foliage in the fall. Many gardeners prefer to put up with the normally small amounts of damage thrips cause rather than using a pesticide.

Rabbits and deer are becoming a greater issue in suburban and rural gardens as they adapt to the human world and populations soar. Rabbits often feast on newly emerging foliage and later ignore plants that have grown larger. Deer are more damaging, often stripping buds from plants that are near bloom. If rabbits and deer do become pests, a number of chemicals are available on the market. Sometimes these chemicals may be applied to a physical barrier, such as a fence or wall, with positive results. A number other barriers have been utilized to prevent deer damage with good results. Berry mesh (used to protect berry crops) can be laid over plants to discourage grazing or more radical barriers such as fencing can be built to surround the garden. Each locale will likely experience different problems with these pests and sleuthing a protection plan that works best in your situation may be needed.

MAIL ORDER PLANTS

Daylilies are commonly sold bare root, packed dry in a box and typically will establish very quickly. Yellowed leaves and dry roots are nothing to worry about. In fact a dry state is often desirable during shipping because it does not allow fungus and bacterial diseases to get started within the plant. Once you have received your plants, we recommend soaking the roots in a solution of 1 tablespoon of water soluble fertilizer (10-10-10 is fine, Miracle Grow™ is also good) to a gallon of water for 2 to 5 hours. This practice will jump start the plants for fast establishment and good growth in the garden. New plantings of daylilies should be protected from high temperatures for approximately two weeks. Some growers place pine bows or mulch them heavily during this period. In areas where temperatures remain below 80 degrees Fahrenheit, no special measures need to be taken. During periods of very high temperatures it is recommended that some extra shading be supplied for the duration of these conditions (high soil temperatures during and after transplant can encourage rot problems).