

Dayflowers dazzle with beauty

By Dr. Robert Naczi

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The blooms of dayflowers are the essence of fleeting beauty. Stunning but ephemeral, each flower lasts no longer than one day. After opening in the early morning, the flowers wilt by the late afternoon (often earlier), then quickly auto-digest and liquefy.

All members of the dayflower family (Commelinaceae) have flowers with three short-lived petals. Many of the species have flowers with hairy filaments (the stalks of the pollen-bearing anthers). Another unusual aspect of many members of the family is their succulent leaves. Some well-known examples of dayflowers are wandering Jew, Moses-in-a-boat, and spiderworts.

Spiderworts (Tradescantia

Garden Tales

species), particularly, are wonderful garden plants. What these plants lack in floral longevity, they more than compensate for by high numbers of flowers per plant, length of blooming season, and sheer beauty. In addition, spiderworts tend to have larger flowers than other dayflowers.

Unlike the flowers of many species in other plant families, the flowers of spiderworts open even in cloudy and wet weather. Additional merits of spiderworts include their resistance to most diseases and pests, ease of cultivation in sun or shade, and lack of aggressive tendencies. This last property is noteworthy because some dayflowers, belonging to

other genera, are weeds.

About 70 species of spiderworts exist, many of them native to eastern North America. Though relatively few species are cultivated, many cultivars are available from nurseries, catalogs, and online. These cultivars provide choices of purple, pink, blue, and white petals that will add color and interest to your garden.

Editor's note: Dr. Robert Naczi is curator of the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium on the campus of Delaware State University. The herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call 302-857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost) to arrange a tour of the Herbarium, and call 302-857-6450 (Dr. Naczi) for more information about this article.



Submitted photo

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