

Gardeners constantly dazzled by daylilies

By Thomas White

Master Gardener

During the winter months, as you plan your garden for next spring and summer, think about the dazzling world of daylilies. For many reasons, the daylily is the perfect flowering plant for your garden. As a perennial it grows and blooms year after year, saving you time — you won't have to plant it each spring — and money — you won't have to buy new plants year after year.

The Latin name for daylily, "*Hemerocallis*," comes from two Greek words meaning "beauty" and "day." The daylily flower brings daily beauty to the garden, blooming for only one day. However, with many flower stems, called scapes, each with many buds, the season of bloom is long. There are early, mid-season, and late bloomers, as well as re-bloomers, providing "daily beauty" from early June until late October.

There are more than 60,000 named varieties of daylilies, providing a broad range of colors and forms. Yellows, melon-colored, oranges, reds, pinks, purples, lavenders, near whites, and combinations of these colors cover the spectrum. The range of flower forms is just as wide: large blooms, 6 and 8 inches in diameter; miniatures, 3 inches or less; spiders, some as large as 11 inches; and doubles.

What makes the daylily even more won-

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derful is its durability. With just a little care, the daylily flourishes in a wide range of climates, yet blooms well even with neglect. The only essential needs are sun, at least 6 hours daily, and water. Few pests and diseases bother the daylily.

Average garden soil, with a pH of 6-6.5 that drains well, is enough. If you want to pamper your daylilies, feed them with a complete fertilizer in the spring and a low nitrogen fertilizer in the fall and they will reward you with a symphony of blooms. A deep watering every week to 10 days encourages even more blooms, and larger ones, as well as re-blooming. Mulching helps to retain water, control weeds, and provide winter protection. Keep daylilies away from trees so that their roots won't compete with the daylily for the water they crave.

If, by chance, thrips or aphids enjoy your daylilies, spray with a mildly systemic pesticide, beginning in early spring. Spider mites need merely to be washed away with a strong spray from the garden hose.

Slugs can be picked off at night with a flashlight. If deer are in your neighborhood, get a dog, or you can hang garlic vials among the plants or spray them with a deer repellent. Daylilies are nearly carefree;



Submitted photo/Steve Karg

One of the old double daylilies, dating from 1860, is Flore Pleno. Kwanzo — a variegated daylily — is very similar. Both vigorous daylilies are often found at old sites of houses and are sterile (they do not set seed), although their vegetative propagation is abundant.

you shouldn't find many, if any, of these pests marring their beauty.

If you still have questions about this amazing perennial, call the hotline at your Delaware Cooperative Extension Office: New Castle County: (302) 831-8862; Kent County: 730-4000; and, Sussex County: (302) 856-2585, ext. 535.

For a host of information about daylilies, visit the Web site of the American Hemerocallis Society: www.daylilies.org. There,

you will discover the most popular daylilies for this geographic region and throughout the nation, as voted by members of the society; you will also find sources for purchasing daylilies and tips on planting and dividing them as well.

So, as you sit by the fire with your cup of tea, watching the snow fall this winter, picture your barren garden and contemplate its beauty next summer as the daylilies you plant in the spring dazzle you with their spectacular bloom. I can promise you they won't disappoint. Daylilies are bedazzling!

Editor's note: Thomas White has been a Lutheran pastor for 40 years, having served two parishes in Maryland. In 2007, he retired as the Head Chaplain at The National Lutheran Home, a continuing care facility for the aged, in Rockville, Md., and now lives in Rehoboth Beach. He completed the Delaware Master Gardener Training Program last November, a goal for retirement. Gardening is one of his passions. When he was eight, Thomas planted his first garden of zinnias, marigolds, cosmos, and four o'clocks. He can be contacted at whiteall99@aol.com.

For more information about the Master Gardener program, contact at Delaware State University Cooperative Extension at (302) 857-6424 or by e-mail at m Moor@desu.edu.