

Many people believe that the daylily is the perfect perennial flowering plant. Why? First of all, this flower survives with very little care. There are few insects or diseases that are bothersome to the daylily, and drought rarely seems to be a problem. Throw in the facts that they grow just about anywhere, come in many colors and sizes, and have a long season of bloom. This is my kind of plant.

Hemerocallis, the scientific name for daylily, comes from Greek words meaning ‘beauty’ and ‘day’. Each single blossom will open and last for only one day. Each flower stalk has many buds, however, so the plant will continue to bloom for a long period of time. Bloom times vary by cultivar and range from March through summer. Stretch your daylily color display by carefully choosing cultivars from each bloom period.

There are many uses for this versatile plant in the landscape. If you are focusing on an edible landscape, the flower buds and petals may be eaten raw in salads and as lovely garnishes. The flowers and buds can be boiled, stir-fried, steamed, or batter fried to make tasty side dishes. Dried flower petals, called ‘golden needles’, are often used in Chinese cooking.

The leaf form of the daylily is grass-like and clumping. Short forms of 12 inches or less are ideal for edging plants and garden borders. Tall forms with leaves reaching 36 inches work well in foundation landscape plantings. They also make an attractive background for shorter plants even when they are not in bloom. When used around water, such as a garden pool or pond, they add a naturalized look.

Daylilies will grow in just about any Florida soil, but they’ll grow best in slightly acidic soil amended with organic material. Darker varieties tend to grow best in partial shade, or filtered sunlight such as under pines. Lighter pastel colored varieties need full sun to develop their full potential. Avoid areas of heavy shade.

Although daylilies are tolerant of drought conditions, supplemental water during extended dry periods will keep plants healthy and more able to cope with other stressors such as insects and diseases. Most plants benefit from morning irrigation, but researchers have found that daylilies benefit the most from moist soil during the evening hours.

For more research based information on daylilies, go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep006> or call the Master Gardeners at 752-5384. Come to our free workshop on “Gardening for Butterflies” on May 17th, 5:45 at the Fort White Public Library, and on May 19th, 2 pm at the Public Library in downtown Lake City. *(Published 5-13-12)*