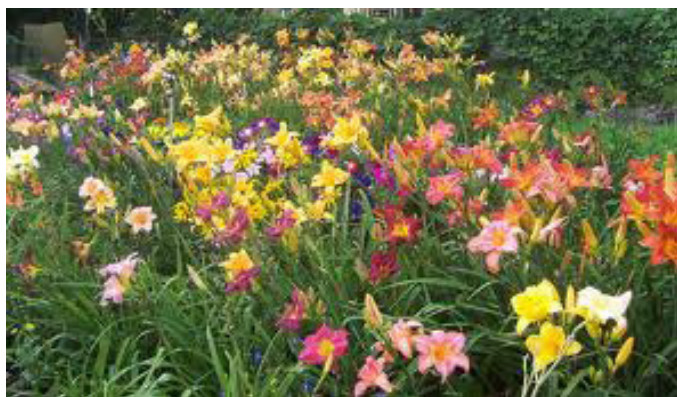


# EASY GROWING

## The Durable Day Lily

Day lilies, often called the “perfect perennial”, probably abound in your garden already. They



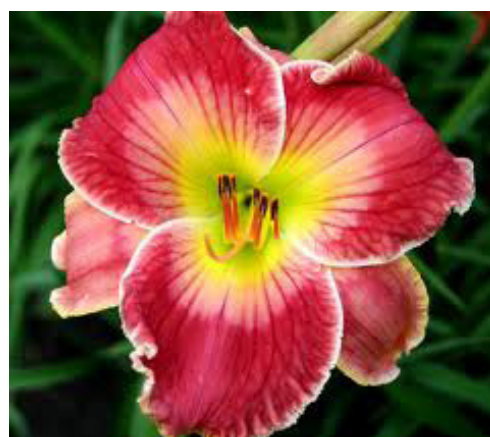
may have insidiously taken over sections of it. Clumped around a mailbox, at the edge of a wall, along a path or around a pond, they flourish, adding a touch of brilliant color and a soft wave of green. Long Island is a perfect environment for these beauties, although their range extends from California to Canada.

They are not true lilies. They belong to the genus *Hemerocallis*, from the Greek meaning “beautiful for a day”, for each blossom lasts only that long. Plants produce many buds so that blooming time can extend for 30 to 40 days. Flowers tend to face

the light. In China, day lilies were called the “Plant of Forgetfulness” because it was believed they cured sorrow by causing loss of memory.

There are thousands of varieties of hybrid day lilies with colors that go from creamy white to yellow, pink, coral, red, and orange to almost black, a far cry from the original yellow, orange and reddish hues. Heights range from 18 inches to 4 feet and flowering times vary from early to late summer. Careful selection will allow the aficionado to have blossoms all summer long.

While most of us take the day lily for granted, enjoying (and sometimes curbing) their ability to spread, hybridizers adore them. It’s relatively easy for the amateur to create a new variety by mingling the pollen from one to another. Seeds are collected and planted, indoors or out. In a year or two, the results are visible. Imagine the glory of creating a brand new, brilliantly colored blossom!



To prepare soil for planting, work it deeply, incorporating compost, peat moss, well-rotted manure or other organic matter. Dig a hole large enough to take the tuber and its roots without crowding them. Place the plant in the soil so that the crown (the part where the roots and stem meet) is one inch below ground level. Water thoroughly. The tubers grow best in full sunlight although they can deal with partial shade and are drought tolerant.

Good grooming--dead-heading spent blossoms and clipping stalks after flowering--will ensure an attractive appearance all summer long. Day lilies generally need dividing and replanting every three or four years. In the fall or early spring, separate the tubers, and leaving each division with at least three stems before replanting.

### FOR THE MAY GARDEN

Plant dahlias, cannas, gladiolus, and day lilies.

Sow seeds of beans, corn, eggplant, peppers.

Start sowing radishes and keep it up till July for a continuing crop.

Pinch tips of chrysanthemums on each holiday: Memorial Day, Flag Day, and the Fourth of July.

Prune spring-flowering shrubs after blooming

Plant annuals and vegetables outside after mid-May.

Plant pumpkins late in month.

Divide fall-flowering perennials like bee balm, asters, tansy, and golden rod.

Fertilize roses every two to three weeks.

## This Year's Gold Medal



This year, *Baptisia australis* (Blue False Indigo) a drought-tolerant perennial, was one of four Gold Medal Plants chosen by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County. Gold Medal Plants, chosen annually, are defined as “under utilized plant material of exceptional merit particularly suited for growing on Long Island”. I can personally testify that this plant is a joy to have in the garden. Every year, this very tall, large clump flourishes in my garden, displaying pea-like blue flowers which become attractive black pods in time. Other varieties are available in shades of violet, white, or yellow.

A member of the pea family, its name is derived from the Greek, “bapto” (to immerse), and “australis”, Latin for southern. It’s called Blue False Indigo because the Cherokees used it as a source of blue dye. The plants require little maintenance as

long as they have plenty of sun, a reasonable amount of moisture, and are left alone to thrive. Their tap roots are very deep, so it’s best to leave them in place. Under ideal circumstances, the plant will increase in size annually.

Its attractive black seed pods rustle in the wind while the leaves remain green all summer. Finally, in the fall or very early spring, it’s time to cut the stems down to the ground . One warning: the seeds may be toxic, particularly for children.

