



Hemerocallis

'Paprika Velvet'

Enduring Daylilies

Out of the thousands of plants introduced in the last 40 years, a handful still belong in your garden. Sydney Eddison

IT IS SAD BUT TRUE that, like books, cultivated plants go out of circulation, even good ones that should be in every garden. Because hybridizers are always focused on their next creation, this fate often befalls older daylily cultivars. The breeders' passion for novelty and the generous nature of the daylily itself, are at the root of the problem.

The reason is simple. Daylilies hold out the possibility of almost unlimited new colors, patterns, and edgings, and they are shamelessly easy to breed.

When I began growing daylilies 40 years ago, the color range was limited to shades and tints of red, orange, yellow, and, arguably, pink. In the last 20 years, there have been dramatic improvements in the pinks and reds. Beautiful purples and whites have been added to the daylily spectrum, and the flower shape has undergone a transformation.

The latest developments are in color patterns. Contrasting eyes and edges are "in." Fashions, however, can change in a heartbeat. A decade ago, a purple flower with gold edges was big news. Today, double edges, rare in the mid-1990s, have become commonplace. That's the daylily—infininitely variable and eager to please. It's little wonder that there are 45,000 registered cultivars!

I confess to being as susceptible to the excitement of the new as any other daylily fan, but I hate to see old cultivars of distinction becoming hard to find or,

worse, vanishing altogether. My fondness for these older daylilies has nothing to do with sentiment or historic preservation; it has to do with merit. Some are just too good to lose.

The following are cultivars that I would never be without. All were introduced before 1980 and have been in my garden for at least 10 years, some much longer. Most bloom for three weeks, and often more, beginning in early July. Every one is a superior garden plant: vigorous and floriferous, with singular charms and flowers of great beauty.

Not surprisingly, given the genetic background of the genus, four of these venerable daylilies are yellow; three are orange, two are gold, one is red, one purple, and one pink. With few exceptions, they are "selfs," in which the segments are all the same color. For sheer garden impact, give me solid-colored daylilies any day.

Starting with the yellows, 'Whir of Lace' (Wild 1965) entered my garden in a shipment from the Gilbert H. Wild Company in the 1960s. It is a relatively late bloomer—mid-July into August. The flower color was described in the catalog as "grapefruit yellow," which is perfect for its fresh, cool hue. The blossoms are of medium size and delightfully, if modestly, ruffled. Ruffles were unusual when this plant was introduced, and add a crispness to the flower's appearance. The 36-inch scapes (flower stems) lift the blossoms well above the arching leaves and make 'Whir of



Hemerocallis
'Butterpat'



Hemerocallis
'Cherry Cheeks'

Passionate for Daylilies?

If daylilies are more than a passing fancy, consider a membership in the American Hemerocallis Society. To learn more visit the society's web site: www.daylilies.org. Or write Pat Mercer, AHS Executive Secretary, P.O. Box 10, Dexter, Georgia 31019.

Lace' an ideal partner for ornamental grasses, especially those with variegated foliage such as *Miscanthus gracillimus* 'Variegata' or *M. g.* 'Strictus'.

'Corky', 'Butterpat', and 'Puddin' are all small-flowered plants, but they have great garden presence. In each case, the blossoms measure approximately two and a half inches across. 'Corky' (Fischer 1959) is a little gem with clear yellow trumpets brushed on the backs with brown. Numerous dainty, graceful flowers are carried on wiry scapes 34 inches high, above thin, grassy foliage in midsummer.

'Butterpat' (Kennedy 1970) has a more robust appearance, thicker scapes, and broader foliage. The flowers, of which there are dozens and dozens, are pale lemon-yellow, and their form is wide open and flaring. 'Puddin' (Kennedy 1970) rounds out the threesome with abundant blossoms of a form and color completely different from the other two—small, plump triangles of a warm, creamy yellow borne on 20-inch scapes.

Not every gardener likes orange. But I've never met anyone who didn't fall for 'Rocket City' (Hardy 1968). This plant is in a class by itself for vigor and flower production. Strong 36-inch scapes bear dozens of big, bold marmalade-orange blossoms with a deep orange eye. When a flower boasts a zone of a darker shade or

a different color between the throat and the tips of the segment, it is called an eye. Masses of these wonderful flowers light up the garden for at least three or four weeks from mid-July into August.

The aptly named 'Paprika Velvet' (Hardy 1969) is a worthy offspring of 'Rocket City' and performs with equal vigor. As floriferous as its distinguished parent, it produces quantities of red-orange flowers on 24-inch scapes. It is cheering to report that these two fine daylilies are still available, but alas, dear little 'Sparks' (Kraus 1952) is not. It's a crime because every gardener who sees it wants it. The small, incandescent red-orange flowers appear to be lit from within by brilliant golden throats, and they do glow like sparks.

Gold is a common color in daylilies and one of the most visually carrying, which makes it popular with some gardeners and not with others. But no one fails to notice a clump of 'Bengaleer' (Peck 1968) in full bloom. This is the quintessential "golden oldie." The color is rich but not garish; the flowers, produced in great numbers, are suitably large and handsome; the plant increases rapidly and is as tough as nails. Add to this a late blooming season—from the end of July well into August—and you have a winner.



In the mid-1970s, I would never have dreamed that a double daylily would one day become one of my all-time favorites. At that time, doubles were ungainly things with wads of messy-looking segments that often weighed down their inadequate scapes. I grew a couple and found them wanting. But 10 years later, I discovered *'Condilla'* (Grooms 1979), a gorgeous double with the extra petals neatly layered and arranged in a perfectly symmetrical flower. The scapes leave nothing to be desired—they're 20 inches tall and sturdy—and the flower color is beautiful, similar to but a shade lighter than *'Bengaleer'*.

My treasures from the past include only one red, one pink, and one purple. These colors are relatively new in daylilies. The first red was introduced by Dr. Arlow B. Stout at the New York Botanical Garden in 1934, and it took the next 20 years to refine and clarify the color. The first pinks were also the work of Dr. Stout and began to appear in the late '30s and early '40s. Again, it took many years to create pinks worthy of the name, and the same goes for purples.

Luscious shades of all three colors are available today. So why bother with these old cultivars? For reasons that I am delighted to tell you. *'Cherry Cheeks'* (Peck 1969) is a unique shade of cerise. I have never seen it

in any other daylily, and that would be reason enough to grow it, but there are others: robust good health and large, eye-catching flowers—lots of them, supported by sturdy 28-inch scapes.

'Little Grapette' (Williamson 1970), an early bloomer, is already a classic and probably doesn't need my help to stay in circulation forever. One plant can easily fill a bushel basket with flowers in its second season in the garden. The color of the flowers is intriguingly like that of Red Flame grapes—a light reddish-purple, an effective contrast to the yellow-green throat.

Although there are pinks with wider petals, rounder faces, and more ruffles, I doubt that there will ever be one that produces more flowers than *'Lullaby Baby'* (Spalding 1975). Few daylilies can compete with *'Lullaby Baby's'* long season of bloom. And the creamy pink flowers look good enough to eat.

With the sad exception of *'Sparks'*, all these cultivars are still extant. If you want beautiful flowers and strong, reliable daylilies that have stood the test of time, then consider planting some of my old favorites. You'll be doing them a favor, for which they will repay you a thousandfold. ♡

Daylily Sources

To find the plants mentioned in this article (and any other daylily you're interested in growing), check out the *Eureka Daylily Reference Guide for 2002*. This yearly publication lists daylily cultivars—13,000 in the current issue—that remain in commercial production, along with nursery sources.