

## Is There a Perfect Perennial?

A daylily catalog that appeared on the last day it snowed had a sub-head, “source for America’s Perfect Perennial”. They surely have a point. One reason they are so loved here is that they follow the daffodil plantings, allowing the daylilies’ new growth to shield the daffodils fading leaves. Over a lot of years and too many gardens, I have planted daylilies, *Hemerocallis*. They have survived drought, neglect, deer, rabbits and the fact that, unlike the true lilies, their lovely blooms last only a day.

The plants I have purchased have been the older cultivars as those are the ones likely to be grouped into those irresistible ‘10 for \$20’ offers. The variety is endless as there are tens of thousands of them registered. Surely I am not disapproving of those flamboyant marvels that are the result of assiduous and expensive breeding programs and a large helping of luck. However all of them are so lovely, the ordinary sorts will do just fine. Like babies of all species, each new arrival is both welcome and ultimately a genetic surprise.

Newer choices are often tetraploid, having twice the number of chromosomes which makes breeding them twice as surprising? The tetraploid plants I’ve tried have been stronger, more vigorous, and evidently tastier, as one promising plant has been deer-snacked just as the blooms were ready to open so often I can’t remember what color it is. As to color, there used to be yellow ones and the lanky orange ones that decorated the ditches along country lanes. Actually the old *Hemerocallis fulva* taught me what the common name signified. When the blooms picked from plants taller than I were presented to my beloved great aunt, the flowers had closed and no amount of coaxing could rejuvenate them.

Today the colors are in as much profusion as the flower designs: pink, rose, red, lavender, purple, peach, a near white – in endless combinations of spiders and doubles, ruffled and haloed. Surprisingly, still available is simple and lemon yellow ‘Hyperion’, truly an old-timer and given a 2011 Award of Merit. No understanding these things, do you think? But then the ubiquitous light orange ‘Stella de Oro’ was a 1985 Stout Medal Winner, possibly because of its off-and-on-until-frost bloom cycle.

Most of the daylilies grown in Tidewater are evergreen or semi-evergreen and may be divided in spring, now that it has come. If your older plants have become so shaded they fail to flower, divide and replant in an enriched-with-compost soil in a sunny spot. They will love it!

Late one spring I noticed a few of the daylily leaves on one plant were streaked in brown. An expert assured me that the plant was not infected with *Puccinia heterocallidis*. Relieved, but not totally convinced, I pulled out the *Patrinia* that had spread itself into the daylily bed. The fungal disease *Puccinia heterocallidis* was first found in the 1880s in Siberia. This fungus, native to Russia, Taiwan, Japan, China, and Korea, has immigrated to the US. In August 2000 plant pathologists at the University of Georgia identified it in nursery plants in Georgia. Since 2001 it has been reported countrywide in 30 states although it is most prevalent among the evergreen and semi-evergreen varieties of the humid South.

The fungus can over-winter either as a fungal mycelium inside living tissue or survive as spores waiting for a spring wake-up call. To make eradication challenging there are both winter and summer spores. It is the winter spores that infect the *Patrinia* making it a part of the life cycle of this disease.

To be on the lookout for this pathogen, inspect the underside of daylily leaves for yellow-orange to rust-brown bumps that eventually release summer spores. To treat the plant, remove the infected leaves (not to the compost pile) and apply a fungicide to the new growth. Avoid

overhead watering and space the plants for good air circulation. The Hemerocallis website has more information. [www.daylilies.org](http://www.daylilies.org).

10 Apr 14