

Hemerocallis

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I have noticed that the popularity of Hemerocallis has been declining year on year, so much so that we no longer propagate them for sale. Ten years ago we stocked and sold over 20 different varieties but gardeners seem to be put off by the common name 'Daylily', thinking wrongly that they only flower for a day. Good cultivars will in fact produce a succession of flowers for many weeks although each individual flower does only last for a day. Some cultivars also look very untidy if not regularly deadheaded which makes them unappealing as a trouble-free garden plant.

The other, more serious, problem with Hemerocallis which is putting gardeners off is the spread of Hemerocallis Gall Midge which arrived in the UK in 1989. Adult Hemerocallis Gall Midges emerge in May to June and lay eggs on the developing flower buds on daylilies. The larvae feed inside the buds and those that are infested develop in an abnormal manner. Instead of being long and slender, infested flower buds are shortened and have an enlarged conical shape. The larvae are up to 3mm long and almost transparent, which can make them difficult to see in the watery liquid that accumulates between the petals in the base of the bud. Galled flower buds either rot or dry up without opening, then fall to the ground where the larvae go into the soil to overwinter inside silk cocoons.

In our own garden we have noticed gall midge infestation on our garden grown daylilies for about 6 years. It seems to only affect the early season cultivars and we just pick off the affected buds in the hope that we will break the cycle. Some people spray with a systemic insecticide applied in May and June with some success. This year our early cultivars were so badly infested that we had to pick off almost all the buds, which has made us review whether we wish to continue growing them.

Hemerocallis do need regular division every three to five years to keep their vigour - a job I'm afraid I have failed to keep on top of. Many of our clumps of Hemerocallis have not been divided for over 6 years and they have now become congested, sparsely flowered and less able to deal with dry periods of weather. It is recommended by specialist growers that the soil is prepared to a depth of 2 feet with plenty of humus incorporated so I will be lifting all our clumps this autumn to try to improve their performance (I'm not sure about the 2 feet deep though!). Some of the early cultivars will be discarded, but I would not be without some of the later season cultivars. Good forms which we can recommend are:-

- H. 'Sammy Russell' (deep red flowers, very free flowering)
- H. 'Crimson Pirate' (scarlet flowers, short and compact)
- H. 'Ringlets' (custard yellow rounded flowers on tall stems)
- H. 'Chicago Sunrise' (golden yellow flowers, stately habit)
- H. 'Morocco Red' (bright red flowers on tall stems)
- H. 'Pink Charm' (dusky pink flowers held well above foliage, free flowering)
- H. 'Golden Zebra' (yellow flowers, gold / green striped foliage, compact, showy)

With careful selection and good cultivation Hemerocallis make a worthy addition to the mixed border but they are definitely not plants for a low maintenance garden.