A love affair with day lilies

by Elda Brown
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My love affair with daylilies began in Georgia, was cemented in Tennessee and continues to play out here in North Carolina, where their jewel-like colors beckon to me at the tailgate market in Brevard each Saturday.

I was first smitten with a swath of daylilies in my neighbor’s yard in Marietta, Georgia. The mixture of hues was eye candy to me. These were not the standard roadside orange. I vowed then to have such a show in my own yard. Little did I know how hard it would be to choose which of the 13,000 cultivars of this flower to plant!

My daughter and I were on a hiking trip in Tennessee when I saw the roadside sign advertising daylilies for sale. On a hillside below the grower’s log house were hundreds of multi-colored daylilies. We selected a few and my collection was started.

Those daylilies were among the first plants dug from my garden in Georgia when we moved to Transylvania County. One of the many marvelous things about daylilies is how easily they transplant.

Daylilies have been called the perfect perennial flower because they are hardy, easy to grow, drought tolerant and rarely troubled by disease or insects. They last for years without a lot of care and can be planted in most any type soil as long as it drains well. Few plants are as rugged, widely adapted or versatile as daylilies.

One thing I love about them is how quickly they multiply. Every couple of years they need to be divided. Some gardeners don’t care for that chore, but I like to share them and I find that dividing is easy. The only other regular maintenance is removing the spent leaves. Pull them off as they turn brown and your daylilies will be healthier.

Daylilies are planted differently than other perennials. They do best when planted on a mound of soil in the center of a hole, similar to the way you plant asparagus. The biggest mistake people make is planting them too deep. The crown of the plant, the point where the fans meet the roots, should be no more than an inch below the soil’s surface. Plant at least 18 inches apart.

Daylilies benefit from deep watering, rather than from a succession of brief, surface waterings. Overhead watering during the heat of the day will cause any open blooms to spot and/or wilt. Watering in the evening can also cause spots on the next day’s blooms.

Daylilies are true to their botanical name, *Hemerocallis*, which means "beauty for a day." Most daylily flowers open in the morning,
then close and die with nightfall. However, each scape (flower stalk) typically has more than a dozen flower buds, so an individual plant can bloom for weeks.

Most daylilies do best in full sun. They will tolerate part-shade conditions, but require a minimum of six hours of direct sun per day. Light yellow cultivars, many shades of pink, and delicate pastels need full sun to bring out their lovely colorings.

Many red and purple cultivars benefit from partial shade in the hottest part of the day because dark colors absorb heat and do not withstand the sun as well as lighter colors.

At this time of year, my yard is awash with amazing daylily color.

Garden tasks for late June:
- Do not start watering cool season grasses unless you will be able to keep it adequately watered all summer. Otherwise, allow it to do dormant (brown) and water every three weeks if it does not rain. Irrigated lawns need 1 inch of water per week.
- Continue fungicide/insecticide sprays on fruit trees and grape vines.
- Fertilize (sidedress) vegetables six weeks after planting.
- Spray tomatoes weekly with a fungicide to control blight.
- Sow herbs and plant pumpkins for Halloween.

*Do you have a question for the Master Gardeners? Send your questions to the Transylvania Times or e-mail us c/o manymoons@citcom.net. The Master Gardener Telephone Clinic is also available to answer your garden questions from March through the end of October on Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to noon at 884-3239. Walk-ins are welcome during those hours at the Community Services Building, 98 E. Morgan St., Brevard. Master Gardeners work at the gardens of Silvermont every Thursday from 9 to 11 a.m. Drop by the gardens and ask questions, help or just enjoy the gardens!*