

# Daylilies are a mid-summer bright spot

By KATHRYN CATES MOORE / Lincoln Journal Star Jul 16, 2011

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Scott Keller has been growing day lilies for about eight years, and in his yard daylilies surround the edges with beautiful colors and new hybrids. Growing in front of him stands the Chance Encounter daylilies. (BRYNN ANDERSON / Lincoln Journal Star)

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Daylilies, the workhorse bloomers in the garden, are in their glory right now. So this weekend, members of the Nebraska Daylily Society will be in Lincoln to compare notes, to tour premier growers' gardens and to talk up the attributes of their favorite flower.

They could start with durability. There's a reason that yellow, Stella d'Oro daylilies circle every bank parking lot and show their sunny faces in street medians. They thrive on hot sun and burst with blooms but aren't invading any other plant's space. They are dutiful, polite and hard to kill.

What could be better?

Not much, according to Scott Keller, whose yard will be one of those on the tour.

Keller's daylily habit started with the Stellas. After having so much success with them -- he even divided some and sold a few -- Keller decided to branch out and try some other varieties.

That's easy with this perennial, scientifically known as *Hemerocallis*, which translates from Greek into "beauty" and "day." Its moniker describes the blooming pattern -- each flower bud remains open for a single day.

There are more than 25,000 varieties of registered daylilies with hobbyists and nurseries registering hundreds of new hybrids every year. Keller has about 75 varieties in his yard, and the other two yards on the public tour will have more than twice that many.

With plain or ruffled petals, varying heights and contrasting colors, daylilies are stunners in any landscape. And that's part of their allure: Almost anybody can grow them. They don't mind the Nebraska heat or our chilly winters. They aren't picky about special soil. In the middle of the summer, these plants brighten the landscape, regardless of what's going on around them.

Unfortunately, when some people think of daylilies, they picture the sometimes-invasive orangeish lily that can often be found in ditches along country roads.

"I call them ditch lilies," Keller said.

Don't compare those to today's daylilies. In the past decade, hybrids have made great strides, Keller said. Breeding for contrasting-colored "eyes" in the center of the flowers, ruffled edges, larger and more substantial petals and higher bud count are just a few of the improvements that can be seen in gardens. And some of them even stay open for a day and a half now.

Strolling along the daylily perimeter of Keller's garden, he points out the latest and greatest of his collection. "Venetian Fringe," which is a newcomer, has "teeth" ruffles on its blooms, and "Bela Lugosi" is a dark burgundy. Another of Keller's favorites is "Circle of Fire." "Peggy Jeffcoat" is a bold yellow double bloomer.

A few have hanging tags indicating Keller has used them to cross-breed. Depending on the results, he knows exactly which flowers he used. Keller, a statistician for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, admits he is more interested in the plants themselves than an artistic landscape plan.

"I'm just an old farm boy who likes working outside," he said.

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