

Growing Hemerocallis

Planting

Hemerocallis grow in a wide range of soils and situations. Some authorities say that well-drained soil is best, but we have successfully grown them in our bog garden. For best results add lots of compost or well rotted manure at planting time, but if you can't (and, be honest, who ever has enough organic matter to add to planting holes?), they *will* grow well in most soils and in most sites but may not get as tall and have smaller or fewer flowers.

They love sun but will grow in fairly heavy shade - particularly the taller more vigorous cultivars. Our particular favourite for "getting on with it" is Rajah, a grow anywhere plant: we have left roots on top of the compost heap over winter only to see them shoot into life in February.

You can plant at most times of the year including midsummer. If you received newly divided plants in autumn or winter as bare root it might be best to pot them up and put them in the greenhouse or cold frame or under a polytunnel. However, at our nursery covered space is at a very rare premium and day lilies just have to put up with winter in the open in pots.

Give them between 1ft 6in and 2ft 6in space depending on size and vigour – remember on the whole diploids are more vigorous than tetraploids. Some species Hemerocallis can run and reach a wide spread. Most cultivars are better behaved. One of the most vigorous in our collection is Rajah and a clump planted 7 years ago is now about 4ft across. When they outgrow their allotted space, dig them up and either break or chop into sections each having at least one leaf crown and replant. Hemerocallis will regrow from roots when a crown is left behind, they don't (in our experience) regrow from their roots.

Plant just with the crown at or just below the surface. In pots and containers they can push their crowns out of the soil as the roots grow, so don't overcrowd the roots or push a plant into a container that is too small for the root system.

Some growers suggest that you should water the plants well straight after planting and then leave them for a couple of weeks. This is meant to encourage new roots to seek out water. We tend to keep them well watered after planting just to make sure they don't dry out and suffer a check to growth.

Growing

Keep them well watered, avoiding wetting the flowers and buds if possible, mulch in late spring, remove dead foliage and feed with a balance fertiliser once a year.

Watering is most effective just before flowering. If you practice a no watering regime then you will find that Hemerocallis tolerate drought. They may become completely dormant in severe drought, regrowing when the rains return.

Deadhead spent blooms. They turn into a soggy mess then dry smeared over the leaves and other buds. Beware that the deadheads can stain clothing and skin - these stains will normally come out with detergent.

There is a train of thought that says plants should not be dead headed until the flowers have completely withered away. The theory is that the plants reabsorb valuable nutrients and amino acids from the fading blooms. This is theory should appeal to those of us who would rather sit down and admire the garden than spend time dead heading. Early flowering varieties should be dead headed to avoid chance of reinfection with gall midge.

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Day Lilies rarely need staking and even large heads of flowers and buds are self supporting. A few cultivars have very thin scapes (flower stems) that require some support. Among these Cleopatra is perhaps the best known example. Our experience is that once the plants form a good dense clumps the leaves help considerably in supporting the flower stems.

Pests and Diseases

Hemerocallis are generally trouble free in the UK. The problems that rarely affect them in the UK are not life threatening to the plants and usually clear up through good garden hygiene and growing conditions.

Slugs and snails may be a short term problem on young foliage, but most plants shrug this off as they grow. Greenfly may infest plants and in really dry weather it is worth looking into the growing points of the leaf rosettes and rubbing off any greenfly that may lurk there. Spraying is not really needed.

Buds of early flowering varieties can be affected by Gall Midge. Buds become swollen and round and eventually drop off. This pest is absent in some years and more noticeable in others. The best treatment is to pick off and dispose of infected buds by sealing in a plastic bag and putting in the dust bin, or by burning. If you allow the rotten buds simply to fall to the soil, the grubs will overwinter in the soil for 1 or 2 years and then reinfest your plants. You can spray with Provado Ultimate Bug Killer as the flower stalks emerge and repeat a couple of times at fortnightly intervals (follow instructions on the packet though). Raking around the base of the plants in winter will expose the grubs to Robins etc. Gall Midge is not a problem at all with late flowering cultivars.

Plants may get streaky or spotted leaves. These can occur for a number of reasons and doesn't normally affect the flower power of the plants. Cutting off and disposing of all foliage in winter will usually remove the problem. Keep plants growing strongly, don't overfeed and improve air circulation around them. Long parallel brown lines along the leaves are normally the tramways left by tiny snails.

You may read about Hemerocallis rust in books. This isn't present in the UK and seems to be a problem of subtropical areas like the Southern USA.

Propagation

Dig up and divide plants ensuring each piece has a fresh leaf fan or dormant leaf bud showing. New plants grow from the woody rhizome not the long roots. They can be grown from seed but won't be the same as their parents.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why doesn't my Hemerocallis flower now?

Answers:

If a plant has flowered well in the past and has now stopped it is probably in need of lifting, dividing and replanting in refreshed soil.

Try moving it into a sunnier spot if it isn't all ready.

Sometimes if a plant is divided into very small pieces it can take a couple of years to bulk up sufficiently to flower.

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Some micropropagated plants available at what seem like bargain prices are shy to flower and often take several years to settle down in the garden.

If the plants are growing strongly, perhaps you have given them a fertiliser that is rich in nitrogen. This produces lots of leaves and no flowers.

Extra early or extra late flowering day lilies can sometimes have their calendars mucked up by planting – early ones flower late in autumn and then miss their spring flowering; late ones flower early in spring and miss their autumn flowering. They normally settle down again for the following year.

Sometimes a plant can just stop flowering. Often a short sharp shock is needed to kickstart flowering. Dig up the plant and leave it on the soil surface for a couple of days before replanting it.

Q. The buds are starting to grow then rotting off.

A: This is due to the grubs of the Gall Midge (which we are told is really a micromoth not a midge). Pick off and dispose of all swollen buds (in a bag in the bin, not in the compost bin) as soon as you see them.

Q. My plants are losing leaves in summer

A. This is a natural reaction to extreme drought. Keep plants well watered and they will soon regrow fresh leaves.

Q: What are Diploids and Tetraploids?

A: This refers to the genetic make up of the plants. In order to get brighter colours and stouter plants breeders used a special chemical to induce plants to have 4 chromosomes (Tetraploids) instead of 2 (Diploids). The only issue for gardeners is that you can't cross Tetraploids with Diploids to get seed.