

DAYLILY

Common Names: Daylily, tawny lily, lemon lily

Botanical Name: *Hemerocallis*

Family: *Liliaceae*

This flower is now as much a part of American gardens as the other immigrant, apple pie. The botanical name comes from the Greek *hemera* (day) and *kallos* (beauty) because the flowers' beauty lasts only one day and so its common name. Daylilies received their name from Linnaeus "*fulva*" for tawny lily and "*flava*" for the lemon lily. It was rare for him to identify flowers by color.



Japan and China used the daylily for food and medicine. They were dried or pickled in salt or cooked as vegetables. The flower buds of the *esculenta* variety were called *gum tsoy* (golden vegetable.) It is thought that the daylily came to Europe early perhaps on the silk routes by traders, as did the rhubarb, which was also a medicinal plant. The Romans used them medicinally. The young leaves, when eaten, are said to be slightly intoxicating. The Chinese had called the lily *hsuan t'sao* or "plant of forgetfulness" because it was thought to lessen the feeling of sorrow by causing one to forget. By the time daylilies reached Germany they were not used as medicine.

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In colonial America the daylily was very popular so much so that they grew wild along the roadways. They are now a huge business due to the large variety of daylilies available to gardeners. The mammoth tetraploid daylilies are much prized by collectors and are created with the help of colchicines, a substance used for manipulating plant genes. Colchicine is an extract first isolated in the 1820s from autumn crocus, or colchicum, by two French scientists. It prevents cell division by inhibiting elongation of the microtubules (the threads that pull chromosomes apart into opposite corners of a cell) so that the cell does not divide and will contain twice as many chromosomes as a normal cell. Mammoth plants and flowers with these new large cells develop. Of late, growers seem to be more interested in smaller flowers with a huge range of color and color combinations.

Daylilies are easy to grow and are found in a variety of garden types from formal to "wild" gardens. Thank goodness the daylily and apple pie are ensconced in our culture today.

100 Flowers and How They got Their Names by Diana Wells

Illustrated by: Ippy Patterson