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From my Garden by H. E. Bates new day lilies

the well-known novelist writes
about how his garden grows



Hemerocallis—from the Greek, *hemero*, day, and *kallos* beauty—ie, I suppose, the beauty of a day, giving us, since this is of the family of lilies, the common name, Day Lily.

This summer it is thirty years since I first went to America—and oddly enough it is the day lily that causes the occasion to be printed darkly on my mind. Everywhere, as I travelled by train, I saw day lilies growing wild on railway banks, miles and miles of coppery-gold trumpets burning in the torrid sunshine. Ever since that summer the brief one-day glory of the *Hemerocallis* flower has remained with me as the symbol of the deepening twilight before war.

In those days, *Hemerocallis aurantiaca major* was a common enough plant in English gardens and occasionally you also saw *H. fulva*, which has rather smaller, yellow flowers. Both, as do most of the species, come from Japan. Both were not merely common but indestructible, accommodating, almost neglected: not, you would have thought, a particularly inspiring subject, like the rose or the dahlia, for the hand of the hybridiser.

The colours offered no particular thrill and gardeners are not over-fond of flowers that last only for a day.

I don't know if the day lily has any particular place in America as a national symbol but it is certain that it was towards the *Hemerocallis* family that American hybridisers decided to direct their skills after the war.

Perhaps they were influenced by the fact that the day lilies ask for no cossetting or expensive treatment. They grow well even in poor conditions.

Today the impoverished relatives of the American railway banks would hardly recognise the kingly, queenly, ducal, imperial cousins of the new *Hemerocallis* dynasty. It is probably true to say that no plant has increased its status in so short a time so much as this. Today the day lily family is vast. It embraces hundreds of hybrids. Its range of colours is as far removed from the original modest brownish *aurantiaca* of the railway tracks as modern gladioli are from our own native species.

There are now numbers of nurseries specially devoted to *Hemerocallis*. A catalogue I have before me lists 75 varieties, a number by no means exhaustive; another offers almost as many, a considerable percentage of them not to be found in the first. The Royal Horticultural Society list of hybrids grown in its garden at Wisley is very considerable and, every September, a few more varieties are selected and planted. One American I know has even succeeded in growing no less than 250 different hybrids. The fact that they may still be seen in September in some parts of the country gives some idea of the period of flowering which newer varieties enjoy.

If you are not particularly successful with lilies—and I must confess I have almost given up the long struggle with them—and are particularly fond of the refined, classical lily shape, then you will find both solace and excitement in the new *Hemerocallis*. I should warn you that they are not cheap; but then, nor are lilies. They are, however, a long-term investment. They grow in beauty with the years. They can be easily divided and propagated. They ask for no expensive fertilisers. They are attractive, with their light green sword-like leaves, even when not in flower. Indeed, while January is still black and only aconites, snowdrops and the very first of the crocus species have just begun to appear, the first pale shoots of the day lilies can be seen pushing brightly through the ground.

The new colours fascinate and bewilder. Gold, cinnamon, pink, treuse, ivory, old rose, mab, primrose, near black: the varieties are limitless and are by no means over-shadowed by the new American Asiatic and New Zealand hybrid lilies. For these you may pay as much as £6 a bulb, but for lilies and day lilies the starting price is much the same: about 5s. But there is little doubt in my mind that the five bob on day lilies is the better spent. The lily's grip on long life is not, in my experience, very muscular. The day lily will go on for several years.

For 5s or 6s, therefore, you can start with Alice, light creamy yellow with a green throat, the petals fluted; Burford, large apricot on strong dark stems; Dawning Light, a strong variety with soft primrose flowers banded brown on the reverse of the petals; pink Damask, a particularly refined rose-pink with a glow of yellow in the central cup; Pink Progress, with big buff-pink flowers; Salmon Sheen, a flattish flower of pale salmon, with a golden throat; President Manque, a pale citron; Fandango, a burnt orange with an orange throat.

But if your favourite maiden aunt or some generous uncle from Liverpool should leave a small fortune you may care to try Crimson Glory, dark rich red, with a very long season of flowering; Helena Smith, melon pink dusted lavender-blue; Francis Fay, pink, ruffled, a huge 6in flower; Patricia Fay, large pure pink with a golden throat; Stafford as dark as the ripe side of a peach; or Emily Stevens, orchid pink, with a green throat and broad petals flaring to purple at the edges.

Yes, but you have no rich maiden aunt lately taken from you; your peach never come up; you are obstinately poor. To which the answer is seeds. Seeds, like the poor, we have always with us. Several firms now offer seed (Thompson and Morgan, Ipswich, for as little as 2s; George Roberts, Faversham, 4s). I am sure that these are not difficult. The resulting plants, from seed sown in early spring, will be ready for planting out by summer and should flower the following year. The George Roberts strain is from Germany and includes shades of pink, rose, crimson, purple, maroon, yellow and gold. And who can tell? There may be among them a glorious discovery in ivory and apple-green, or gold and burgundy, you could name after the maiden aunt that never was.