GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

6/1/2026

Is This Your Next Daylily?

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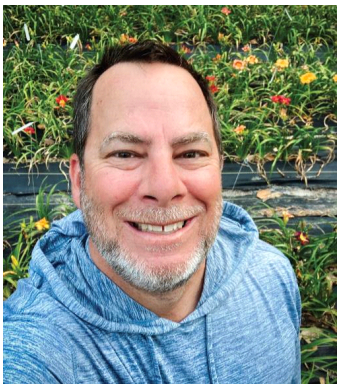


A new rust-resistant daylily collection from Darwin Perennials called DayScape got an impressive 8,000-plant landscape debut this spring at Apogee, an ultra-exclusive golf complex in Hobe Sound, Florida. Hidden Acres Nursery of Sebring, Florida, provided the 1-gal. plants for the project's newest course—a unique 12-hole design by Tom Fazio II (unique because it's made up exclusively of drivable par-4 holes).

Daylily players at Apogee (left to right): Cliff Burg, Savana Fisher Espada, Wes Fisher and Tom Fazio II. Retired developer Cliff introduced his friend Tom to his granddaughter, Savana, who runs the tissue culture lab at Hidden Acres for her dad, Wes. That's how all those DayScapes made it into the landscape at Tom's new course.

But this story isn't about golf, it's about rust-resistant daylilies, something the perennial world has needed since 2000, when the disease, likely imported from Asia, was first found in Georgia and Florida. Since then, it's been confirmed in more than 30 states, primarily in the south and west. Caused by the fungus Puccinia hemerocallidis, daylily rust thrives in the warmth and humidity of Zone 8 and southward, where plants grow year-round and the pathogen isn't killed by cold. Rust weakens growth, reduces flowering and eventually destroys the plant. Fungicides can keep rust at bay, and a few old varieties show some tolerance, but the crop is no longer a mainstay in the southern landscape. DayScape hopes to change that.

DayScape was bred exclusively for Darwin Perennials by Greg Goff, owner of Le Petit Jardin Daylilies in Reddick, Florida, an MSU floriculture grad and former Ball Horticultural Company employee who's been working on the project for more than 25 years.



It began in 2000 when Greg, as perennials manager for Ball Seed, first met Le Petit Jardin founder Dr. Ted Petit, a renowned neuroscientist and avid daylily hybridizer, after seeing a catalog of his spectacular cultivars (a few of which had set daylily auction price records). But while Ted's modern tetraploid daylilies had amazing blooms, the plants didn't come anywhere close to meeting commercial standards. Plus, there was this nasty new rust issue to deal with.

Greg Goff at his daylily breeding site in north Florida—a region he calls "the frustration zone" for its intense heat, humidity, flood, drought, insect and disease pressure. He said it's the perfect place to breed indestructible, yet non-invasive, daylilies.



Ball challenged Ted to a new 10-point breeding program that included traits like rust resistance, more compact plants, earlier and repeat flowering, flood and drought resistance, high bud counts, and perennials that'll grow in any zone—"from tropics to tundra," as Greg said. The scientist accepted the challenge and within a few years a new kind of daylily began emerging from Le Petit Jardin—beautiful blooms on commercial-quality plants —and showed ever-improving rust-resistance.

In 2014, Ted retired and sold the business to Greg and his wife, Marcela, who continued the work to develop the DayScape series. In 2018, Ball Horticultural Company and Le Petit Jardin entered a long-term global exclusive license agreement. For the last eight years, Darwin Perennials has collaborated extensively with the Goffs and tissue culture supplier Hidden Acres to develop the supply chain—a work in progress, but well underway.

The DayScape collection launched with nine colors at the California Spring Trials in March and demand has already outstripped supply. But Darwin tells us there are plenty of trial samples available and that Hidden Acres is ramping up tissue culture production after eight years of R&D. As DayScape becomes widely available to southern gardeners in the next couple of years, it might just bring back a much-loved, long-suffering landscape icon. **GT**