

GROWERTALKS

Guest Column

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Deconstructing DayScape

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Daylilies have split into two worlds. At one end are familiar, economical landscape workhorses such as Stella d'Oro and Happy Returns—early, dependable and easy to use but with relatively modest flowers.

DayScape Lemon Meringue; DayScape Coral Frill; DayScape Coral Blaze: The short ones bloom about 14- to 20-in. high. Coral Blaze is a little shorter and Lemon Meringue is a little taller. Coral Frill has the

heaviest ruffling in the series.

At the other end are the modern tetraploids. Breeders have produced much larger, heavier, more elaborate flowers and substantial plants, but flowering tends to come more toward late June and through July, missing the prime spring retail window.

Then there's the issue of daylily rust that scrambled the market badly in the South. Frost kills the problem for Northern gardeners, but the rust changed the usefulness of the crop as a mass landscape perennial.

Against this backdrop comes the DayScape Daylily series, a coordinated set of nine colors and styles backed by robust rust resistance. Depending on your location, however, the plant's significant feature changes.

Above the frost line

In the North, retailers want to order DayScape because of its early bloom times. The series was specifically bred for this behavior, so plants can bloom as early as May and maybe even April.

The DayScape series features big, beefy daylilies that command respect because of their greater landscape structure, more substantial blooms and higher bud counts. These are tetraploids blooming alongside the early diploids in May, or in retail terms: Standard and Premium blooming side-by-side on the bench at peak traffic.

DayScape also bundles in other retail-friendly features to support the sell.

■ Cold opening matters because an early Northern daylily has to function in cool spring weather. Daylilies try to inflate their blossoms early in the cold morning, but the nose sometimes welds shut and the flower aborts. DayScape doesn't have this bad habit.

- High bud counts generate longer display windows for each scape. The series also has more scapes per fan over time to increase the ornamental value for a season.
- Self-cleaning works differently for daylilies than for bedding plants. Because the scapes rise so high above the fans, daylilies can't bury their dead underneath new growth. Instead, DayScape breaks off the spent blossoms cleanly and rapidly. If the expired petals cling and linger on the other buds in the scape, rot sets in and ruins the upcoming color display.
- Reblooming is always a desired feature, but it's important for Southern growers. If your summers are short, you might notice it, but if your summers are long, you'll notice it.

Below the frost line

None of these details matter once the winters become mild. Retail sale of Southern daylilies is a thing, but that market used to be dwarfed by the gargantuan sales of commercial plantings. Hemerocallis was everywhere until daylily rust rolled in big time in the 2000s.



Rust arrived at almost exactly the wrong time. Daylilies had been sold as extremely durable, low-maintenance landscape perennials. Suddenly, Southern users had a foliar disease that could make them ugly enough to require fungicides or cultivar replacement. Reliable became unreliable and interest waned for daylilies as a serious landscape solution.

DayScape Berries and Cream; DayScape Golden Yellow; DayScape Scarlet Burst: The most dramatic bloom of the series, Berries and Cream is also the tallest, rising up to 40 in. It's the only DayScape with a layered eye-and-edge pattern. The next tallest ones, Golden Yellow and Scarlet Burst, bloom about 28 to 32 in.

For Southern growers, then, robust rust resistance is the signature feature. Not in a single cultivar, mind you, but in a complete series. DayScape revitalizes a potentially huge regional market for growers and buyers in the Southeast because the series has made the daylily a viable player again.

It helps that Darwin (supply chain) and Le Petit Jardin (breeder) developed DayScape in Florida. Because the gene pool and testing trials have been surrounded by daylily rust for over two decades, resistance is Job One in order to protect the investment. The innovation here is the complete package: strong resistance in a full series with a slew of retail benefits sitting on top of it.

A word about daylily rust

Genetic resistance to *Puccinia hemerocallidis* is unquestionably real. A University of Tennessee study inspected the resistance mechanism and found that successful plants shut down fungal development through host-cell death at the infection site. This action stops the fungus so it never spreads. If the plant reacts quickly, the results are so microscopic our eyes never see it. Visually, plants with strong resistance look untouched.

Strong trial data from Penn State University revealed exceptionally healthy plants. At the University of Georgia, trials showed the prolonged flowering in action. These are promising results, but I do need to ring a note of caution. This series is just entering the market and daylily rust has regional variation. Although DayScape's resistance is robust, it's not rustproof. Your mileage might vary, so local testing is always a good idea.

Build that beefy fan

Here's an interesting quirk of the series: DayScape doesn't use accumulated daylight hours to trigger their blooms.

According to Darwin's internal testing, bud initiation comes down to fan maturity. Extending that thought means, for example, growers in the deep South could have blooms as early as March or even February. It means that DayScape could be forced for the winter and early spring shows if you're rigged for it.

Darwin also states clearly that vernalization isn't required. Tissue culture liners that never received cooling can produce scapes in roughly 16 to 18 weeks. Established fall-planted crops bloom earlier because they're more mature, not because they received a cold treatment. **GT**

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