

Future Marketing Potential for Daylilies

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One of the few research studies available on the significance of daylilies in the market place was reported in the *Perennial Plants Quarterly Journal* of the Perennial Plant Association, Volume 3 (4), Autumn 1995. In an article "Views of Management", Tim Rhodus and James Haskin, Department of Horticulture, Ohio State University, reported that in their survey consisting of 441 respondent nursery managers, that they found *Hemerocallis* to be the second most frequently sold genus. *Hosta* was number one.

Their research also showed that few of the managers were growing a wide assortment of named daylilies. 'Stella de Oro' was grown more widely than any other cultivar, 75.4% mentioned this plant. The next most widely grown daylily was 'Hyperion' with 3.9%, and in third place 'Happy Returns' with 2.0%. Other daylilies mentioned were: 'Catherine Woodbery', 'Luxury Lace', 'Mary Todd', TrophytakerTM Series, 'Flying Saucer', 'Rebel Boy', 'Pardon Me', 'Penny's Worth', 'Aztec Gold', 'Brackle Red', 'American Craftsman', 'American Revolution', 'Hall's Pink', 'Dewey Fresh', and 'Hudson Valley'.

With this information as background I began to pursue my mission of looking at the potential future markets for daylilies in the I.P.P.S. Eastern Region. First I determined that the daylily markets directly to the public could be categorized into several groups:

- 1) Mailorder catalog companies with subgroups including:
 - a) Bulb producers selling bareroot daylilies in various plastic packages out of cold storage.
 - b) General garden plant catalog companies carrying a wide assortment of perennials and also sometimes woody plants selling daylilies bareroot.
 - c) Daylily specialists mostly selling fresh bareroot plants during the growing season.
- 2) Mass marketing outlets, garden centers, and roadside markets.
- 3) Landscape contractors and re-wholesalers set up to service the landscape professional.

Then I selected firms representing these categories, and placed a phone call to managers and asked them a series of questions.

Many different questions were asked depending on the conversations. However a few standard questions were asked of each of the respondents.

One of these questions was, "**How important are mailorder firms, garden centers, and landscape contractors in the marketing of daylilies?**" Most interviewees felt that garden centers had the most profound impact on the market since buyers could see the plant in bloom and make decisions from direct observations.

Another question was, "**How important is micropropagation (tissue culture) for increasing numbers?**" Here the answers were extremely variable. Most believe that micropropagation can play some role but that it also has had many limitations in the past.

A third question asked, **“Have you observed a color preference for daylilies?”** Landscape contractors answered stating their convictions for clear yellow and gold while the other groups generally put pink in first place, red second, and white third. There were very mixed feelings about daylilies with eyezones.

The next question was, **“What is more important, rebloom or a long season of bloom from plants with high bud counts?”** Most respondents feel that rebloom is a good selling point but in actuality has lots of limitations because of rest periods and the need for grooming. A few respondents were adamant that a 4- to 6-week bloom period on one set of scapes provided the best landscape effect.

The next question was, **“Is there a preference for size of flower?”** Almost all agree large flowers sell best but then attempt to explain why ‘Stella de Oro’ is so popular.

The final standard question asked was, **“Are there daylilies that do a disservice to future market development?”** One fairly new reblooming cultivar was frequently mentioned. Two respondents felt that evergreen daylilies from southern hybridizers were doing a great disservice to future purchases because they were giving gardeners the feeling that they were weak plants. And still another respondent said all of the old daylilies were a disservice to expanding the daylily market.

All of the respondents mentioned that the market is growing, there is a vast assortment of new types to sell, and there is an abundance of hybridizers insuring the availability of a new product. Generally daylilies are still considered one of the easiest perennial genera to cultivate and they offer color during the hottest part of the summer when many other plants fail.

Following is a smorgasbord of comments made in the telephone conversations:

- ‘Stella de Oro’ is the daylily market. The demand for this cultivar will continue to expand and will probably never be exceeded by any other new cultivar.
- I can sell any daylily if it is well grown and has a picture tag with hardiness zone and “how to” information.
- Daylilies are dependent on housing starts, the more open land the more daylilies will be sold, older subdivisions get shady quickly and require shade-tolerant plants.
- Contractors will never accept containers as a good source of plants, bareroot plants are less expensive and are much easier to take to the jobs.
- The concept of instant gratification is so great that garden centers can expect more and more purchases in 3- and even 5-gal containers.
- Most landscapes with mixed perennials will find clear colors their best choice. There will be a good market in garden centers for some of the new large-flowered daylilies with clear eyezones and popcorn edges.
- A comfortable price range for good new daylilies is between \$7.95 and \$14.95. Over \$15.00, price resistance begins. Some specialists will be able to sell expensive daylilies but the number of sales for daylilies over \$25.00 is small.
- More has to be done to make daylily sales quick and easy, people are time impoverished, they want well labeled plants with prices clearly stated and instant checkout. Sellers repeat when the

product is good and the garden center service excellent. Container plants have the best “shelf life” and can be left for planting later when gardening time is available.

- Daylilies have regional preferences: dormants for the north, evergreens for the south, and those that open after cold nights for the west coast. Markets will expand if the right selection is made for the right location.
- Large-flowered daylilies, those over 6 inches are easiest to sell.
- More education is needed to increase sales. There are 40,000 cultivars with only a couple of dozen plants with name recognition. Often landscape contractors select daylilies from a single wholesale catalog or rely totally on the nursery to select the plants for them.
- Many poorly chosen cultivar names limit the market potential for the plant.
- Presently numbers are difficult to build up so different firms can offer their own unique plants in smaller numbers.
- Recent advances in tissue culture techniques may provide rapid plant increases for new cultivars from foreign markets such as The Netherlands.

My summarizing remarks are that there is an excellent future market potential for daylilies. Growers and retailers, however, cannot expect sales unless they select the right plant for their region, spend adequate money on advertising and signage, price the plants competitively, and provide opportunities for convenient quick shopping.