

WHITEHOUSE PERENNIALS NEWSLETTER - Bloomfest 2007

ASTRANTIA - A SUBTLE STAR

Some plants are so gaudy that you can't fail to notice them in the border. Others have an understated elegance and need to be examined in detail to appreciate their quiet beauty. Astartias or Masterworts are subtle beauties that are best viewed from up close.

Commonly known as pincushion flowers, Astartias are a delight for the flower arranger. Astartia major and its cultivars are the best choices for our gardens with their attractive foliage and star like blooms. The flower heads come in a range of colours from green to pink to red and are surrounded by bracts of slightly deeper colours. The bracts have an intricate pattern of veins, which look like insect wings. Astartias are in bloom right now in the shady section of our display gardens where they thrive with protection from the hot afternoon sun. They bloom for at least four weeks and do provide a bright splash of colour when massed. They are native to the alpine woods and damp meadows of Europe but will survive in full sun as long as there is an adequate supply of moisture. Because of their subtle beauty Astartias are easy to combine with other plants. Their lobed and toothed leaves provide a nice contrast to the rounded leaves of the hostas and their delicate flowers provide a bright spot in the woodland garden. Plants can be left in place for four to five years and are easy to divide early in the spring. They will sometimes self sow and cross freely with other cultivars leading to some interesting colour combinations. Look for these beautiful treasures when

you visit the display gardens and consider finding a spot in your garden to try one of the many interesting varieties available.



Astartia Ruby Wedding

FOLIAGE TYPES IN DAYLILIES

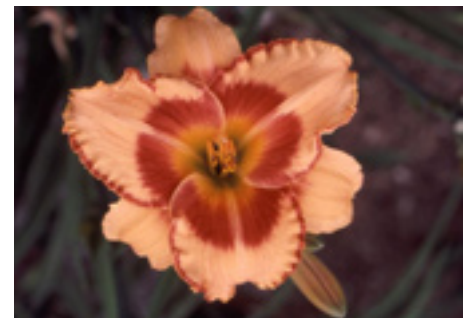
When you read the registration information for a daylily or look at daylily descriptions in catalogues you will notice that the foliage of the daylily is described using one of the following terms; dormant, semi-evergreen or evergreen. Dr Stout, the father of the modern hybrid daylily, developed this classification system. He observed that in cold weather some daylilies die back completely to the ground with no trace of foliage left.



Bathseba - a beautiful rock hardy evergreen

He called these dormant daylilies. These daylilies form resting buds

at the crown and the new foliage emerges with a distinctive spear-like appearance in the spring. Some daylilies remain evergreen all year and will continue to produce new leaves as long as the weather permits. In our cold winters evergreen daylilies will almost always die completely back but some will survive if they are well mulched. Dr Stout observed that many daylilies did not fit either pattern and so he named them semi-evergreen. Today semi-evergreen refers to any daylily that cannot be readily classified as dormant or evergreen. It is often assumed that foliage type determines the hardiness of the daylily but that is not always so. We have evergreen daylilies in our collection that thrive here and have lost dormant daylilies in a winter with poor snow cover.



All Fired Up - one tough evergreen daylily

In reality some daylilies will only survive in the land of the palm trees and others are so hardy they will survive if you leave them lying unplanted on the surface of the soil, as I have occasionally done. We even notice that some of our more tender varieties will struggle in our open field but thrive in the main garden with the protection of the big evergreens which act as a wind break and snow trap. In the spring some daylilies are badly affected by late

spring frosts while others take the vagaries of our spring weather in stride. Providing the daylilies with a good winter mulch helps reduce the tendency to sprout too early as well as preventing the frost heave that can damage newly planted clumps. We also recommend leaving foliage on the plants over the winter to protect the crowns of the plants. When foliage is damaged as it was on some plants this spring, simply cutting down the damaged foliage and letting the plant grow new leaves seems the best way to handle this problem. They will almost always recover from this frost damage and go on to bloom normally. The best assurance of overall hardiness is to purchase field grown daylilies locally or to check the popularity polls for regions of the country with climates similar to ours and buy varieties on those lists.

SPIDER DAYLILIES AND UNUSUAL FORMS



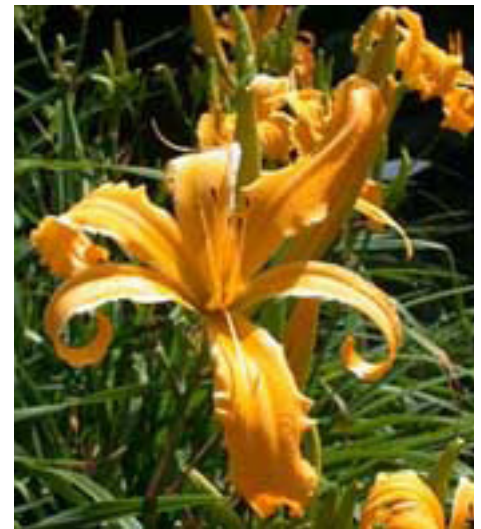
Nona' Garnet Spider
A Classic Spider Form

The first time I saw a spider daylily in bloom I was captivated. The bright red flower was eleven inches across with long curling petals that twisted and turned. It looked so different from the daylily blooms I had previously seen that I knew I had to have it. I have since gone on to buy many more spider daylilies and to start to use them in our breeding program. The growing interest in spider daylilies is a relatively recent phenomenon. The early spiders suffered from low bud count and weak stems so that if more than one flower opened on a scape they tended to fall over. Colour selection was also very limited and few of the early flowers had any kind of ruffling or unique patterning. But the newer spiders have much to offer the gardener. Spider daylily lover Lois Burns writes "almost without exception spider plants bear fair to large flowers when they reach maturity. Many of them can be described as being lyrical, animated, fluttery, swirling, twisted. They usually ride atop tall, graceful, multibranching scapes that are constituted to carry a respectable quota of buds. Many of the flowers that I would call spiderlike are in fact not true spiders according to the American Hemerocallis Society. After much discussion about what constitutes a true spider the AHS adopted the definition that, to be a true spider, the petals must be at least five times as long as they are wide. Petals cannot overlap petals. Petals are allowed to overlap sepals only at the base. The non classic spiders can have a ratio of four to one and may be star or pinwheel shaped with petals that are quilled or spatulate.



Ron Dunn- an unusual form
demonstrating quilled petals

I don't have my measuring tape out in the garden yet to determine if the beautiful new additions to our breeding collection are true spiders or not. I just know that I love them all and will continue to find lots more to grow and propagate.



Asiatic Pheasant –a classic spider
from the 1970's

