

In brief

What Genus of 19 species of hardy herbaceous perennials with flowers that last a single day. Tens of thousands of cultivars and hybrids have been bred.

Origins Native to meadows in Asia, primarily China, Japan, Korea and eastern Russia. A few species have become naturalised in Europe and in North America.

Season The main flowering period is between July and September.

Size Daylilies vary in height from around 60cm to 2m, although most are less than 1m. Flowers can reach up to 30cm across although many are smaller.

Conditions Hemerocallis are adaptable plants but grow best in moist, fertile soils in sunny situations.



Daylilies

As their name suggests, daylilies flower for only one day, but are so easy going and produce so many flowers – of often spectacular size and colour – they deserve their day in the sun

WORDS JOHN HOYLAND PHOTOGRAPHS DIANNA JAZWINSKI

HEMEROCALLIS 'GREEN LINES'
Large, bright-yellow, pleated petals that have a green throat. The flowers have a strong scent and appear in late July with a second flush in September. Bred in the USA in 2006, this is a tall, imposing plant. 1m. RHS H6, USDA 3a-9b†.



John Hoyland is a plantsman and garden writer who has gardens in both southeast England and southwest France.

Daylily suggests an ephemeral plant that can make only a fleeting contribution to the garden. The botanical name, *Hemerocallis*, is derived from the Greek words for 'beauty' and 'day', reinforcing the idea that this is a short-lived wonder. The flowers do only last for a single day (some merely a few hours) but most daylilies produce dozens of stems with several flowers. The result is a plant that is in flower for weeks on end.

The flowers are certainly beautiful but one of the big attractions of daylilies is their adaptability, growing in sun or partial shade and needing no mollycoddling. Few other plants give such impressive results with such little effort. This easy-going nature goes some way to explaining their popularity. In the UK there are around 4,000 hybrids and cultivars available, but in the USA, where *Hemerocallis* breeding borders on competitive mania, a staggering 80,000 different forms of daylily have been registered by the American Hemerocallis Society. Many have been bred in Florida and are not reliably hardy in northern Europe. The range of flower colours encompasses a wide spectrum, often with two or three colours on the same petal. There are flowers that are circular, triangular, trumpet and star-shaped with crimped, ruffled and twisted petals. These are flamboyant flowers as might be imagined by Vivienne Westwood, in colours and shapes that look uneasy in most European gardens.

Hemerocallis species have more delicate flowers than those of the extravagant hybrids. *H. lilioasphodelus*, which has been grown in Britain since the 16th century, has slender stems and clear-yellow, lily-shaped flowers. Its flowers open late in the day and fill the evening air with their perfume. *H. fulva* has attention-grabbing, orange-red flowers that have an apricot-coloured line down the centre of each petal. In rich soil it can grow to 1.2m tall but is generally half that height. As its name suggests, ▷

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.
†Hardiness ratings given where available.

▷ *H. altissima* is the tallest of the daylilies, measuring 2m high. The lemon-yellow flowers have a delicious honey scent that is strongest on warm, summer evenings.

In the wild, *Hemerocallis* grow in meadows and grasslands from the Caucasus mountains and southeast Russia to the Himalayas and throughout China, Taiwan, Japan and Korea. They are robust enough to hold their own against tough, spreading grasses and perennials. The species, and those with uncomplicated flower forms, are suitable for relaxed, informal plantings among grasses and similar perennials or can be planted in the long grass of meadows. Their fresh-green shoots in spring are a perfect complement to spring bulbs. During the summer the dense linear foliage provides an anchor to more airy and delicate herbaceous perennials. In Munich's Westpark they are planted in large blocks around grasses such as *Miscanthus*. In several of his planting schemes, the Dutch designer Piet Oudolf threads wide ribbons of *Hemerocallis* through sedums, other late-flowering perennials, and ornamental grasses.

Hybrids and cultivars are categorised by *Hemerocallis* aficionados into very precise groups, depending on their flower shape and the pattern of the colours on their petals. In the arcane language of the enthusiast flowers can be sculpted, recurved, polymerous or any one of a dozen other shapes and their colouring might be dotted, dusted, bitone or picotee. One of the classifications that has become popular in recent years is 'spider' daylilies. Technically, these have flowers whose petal length is at least four times the petal's width. In practice they seem to be any flower that has long, narrow petals.

Many spider daylilies evoke in their flower shape the simplicity of the species and sit comfortably in mixed and large-group plantings. Their narrow stems allow them to sway in the breeze, bringing a sense of vibrancy and movement to the garden. In the UK they have been promoted by Pollie Maasz, who holds the National Collection of spider and unusual forms of *Hemerocallis*, all of which are hardy. The spider forms are the result of painstaking work by plant breeders yet they still retain the essential relaxed elegance of the species from which they derive.

• John's recommendations for daylilies continue over the next six pages.



HEMEROCALLIS 'TWISTED FIRESTARTER'

A seedling that appeared in Pollie Maasz's nursery in Hampshire. The scarlet petals, as its name suggests, curl under and twist around. The flowers are 20cm wide. 1m. RHS H6, USDA 6b-8b.



H. 'BLACK PLUSH'

Popular in the USA since its introduction in the 1950s, the deep-burgundy flowers have a dark-red sheen that evokes velvet. The centre of the flower is golden yellow. 90cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-10a.



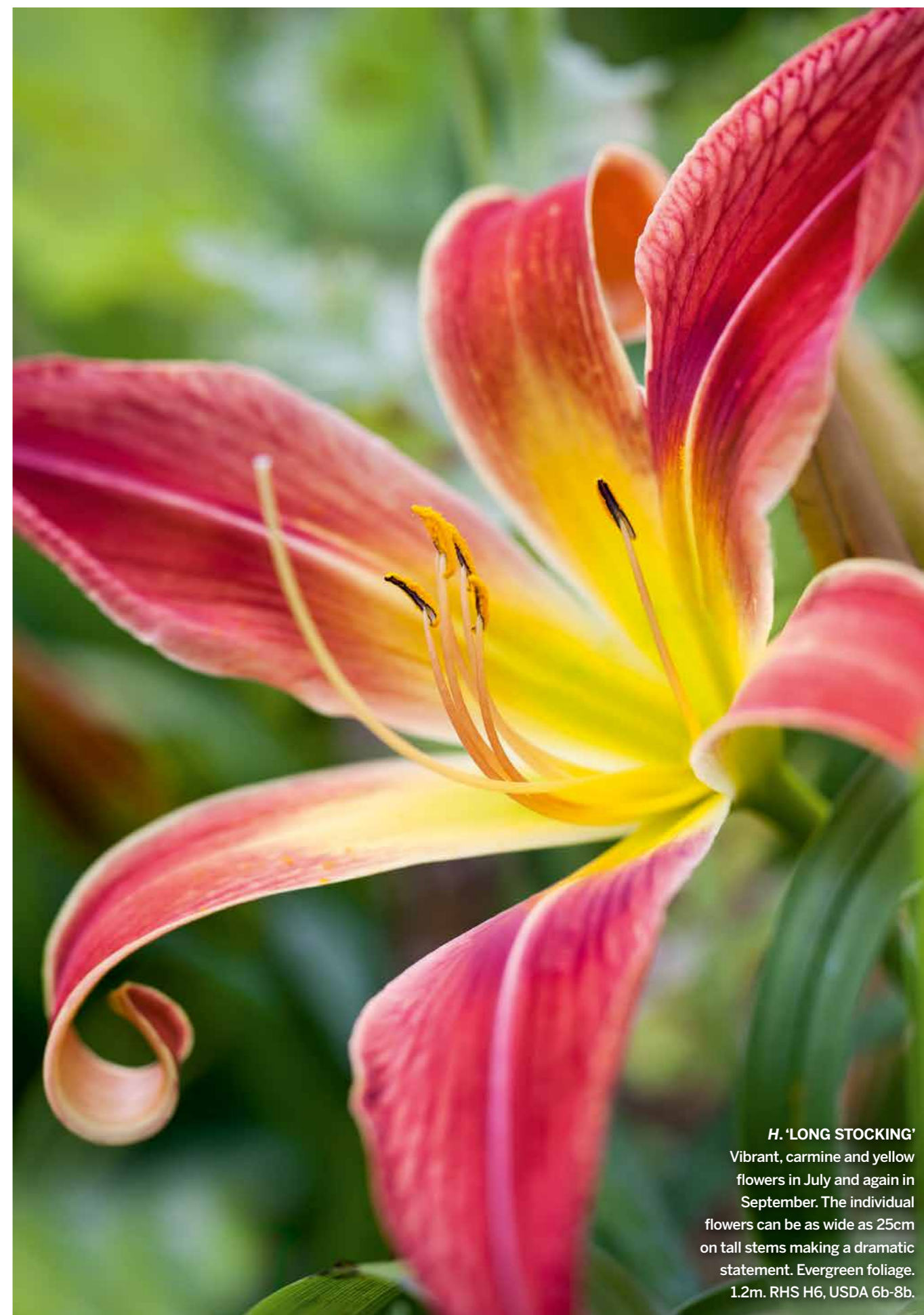
H. 'CHIEF BLACK HAND'

A late-flowering hybrid with dark-mahogany, rounded petals that are a contrasting gold colour at the base. Has a reputation for being very free flowering over a long period. 1m. RHS H6, USDA 3a-9b.



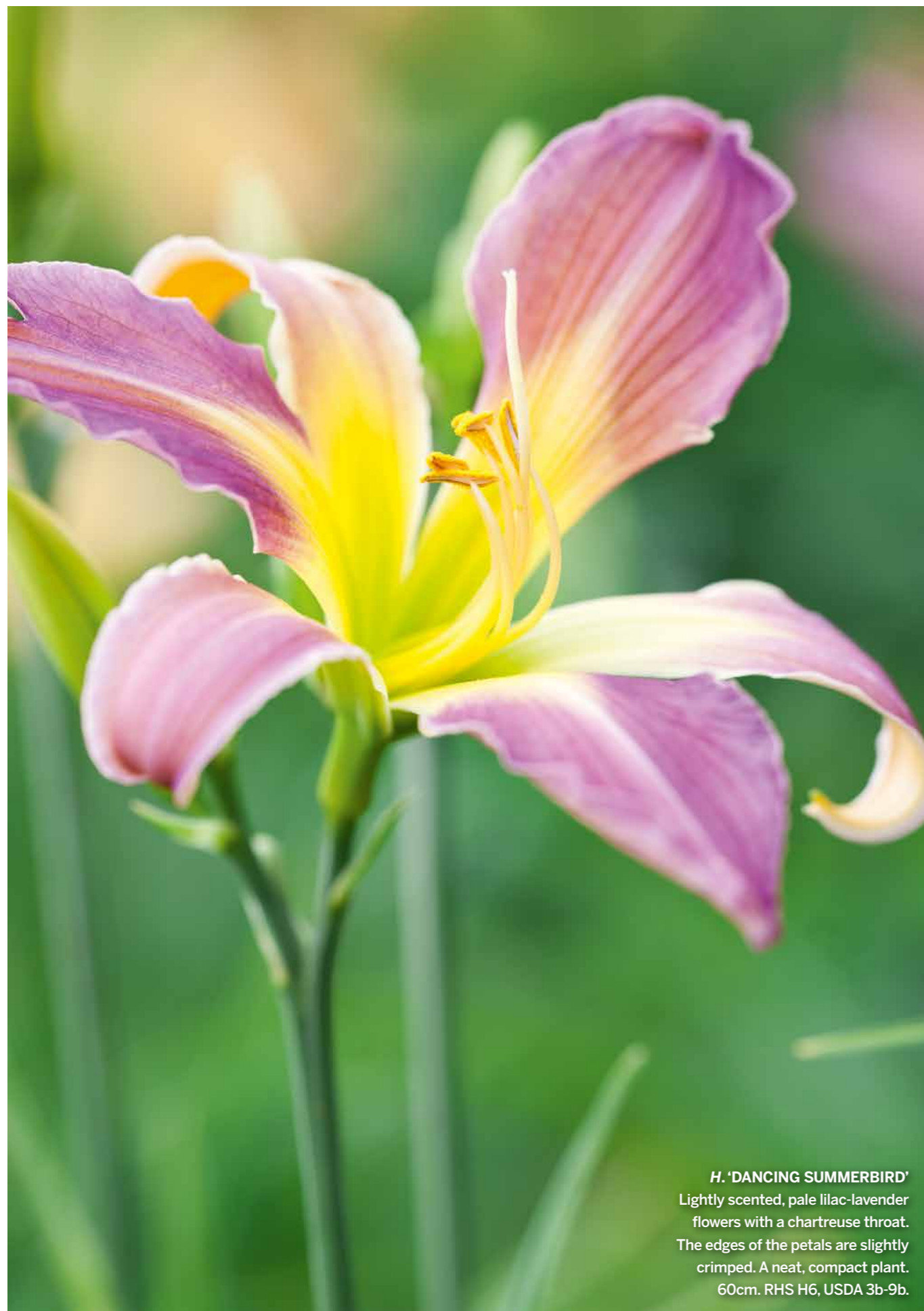
H. 'CLEOPATRA'S WINE'

Its flowers are 20cm wide in an unusual plum colour with a large, pale-yellow, star-shaped centre and a slight scent. The petals have crimped edges and twist as they age. 90cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-9b.



H. 'LONG STOCKING'

Vibrant, carmine and yellow flowers in July and again in September. The individual flowers can be as wide as 25cm on tall stems making a dramatic statement. Evergreen foliage. 1.2m. RHS H6, USDA 6b-8b.



H. 'DANCING SUMMERBIRD'
Lightly scented, pale lilac-lavender flowers with a chartreuse throat. The edges of the petals are slightly crimped. A neat, compact plant. 60cm. RHS H6, USDA 3b-9b.



H. 'PTERODACTYL EYE'
A recent introduction that produces masses of huge flowers, up to 25cm wide, on tall, arching stems. Flowering starts in late July and continues until early September. 1.2m. RHS H6, USDA 3a-9b.



H. 'CERULEAN STAR'
Although the flowers, at 18cm wide, are large, the soft hues of the pale-lavender petals make this a distinctive and elegant daylily. The flowers tend to open late in the afternoon. 90cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-9b.



H. 'WEBSTER'S PINK WONDER'
A plant that lives up to its name being both a rather lovely pink and having quite wondrous flowers that are an improbably large 33cm wide and are an astonishing sight. 1m. RHS H6, USDA 4a-10b.



H. 'CRUISE CONTROL'
Dusky-pink flowers with recurved petals that have a great throat. Although the flowers are a large 17cm wide, this hybrid has a dainty appearance. The flowers are sweetly scented. 1m. RHS H6, USDA 6b-8b.

Cultivation

- Daylilies have a reputation for being undemanding plants that will grow anywhere. It is true that they will cling on to life in poor soils, but to thrive they need fertile, moist soils and a sunny position. To give your daylilies a good start, prepare the site by digging plenty of organic matter into the soil before you plant them and then, once established, mulch them with compost each autumn.

- Mulching is particularly important for large-flowered hybrids as these need lots of energy to produce their flowers. A low-nitrogen fertiliser, applied in spring, will help the plant to produce flowers. Regular deadheading during the flowering season is necessary to keep the plant looking clean. Plants grown in shade will produce fewer flowers than those grown in sun.

- After a few years, clumps will become congested and produce fewer flowers. Dig the plant up, split it into pieces no more than 20cm wide and replant immediately. Unlike most herbaceous perennials, daylilies can be divided at any time of the year as long as the ground is not frozen.

- Daylilies have a midge, the *hemerocallis* gall midge, which lays its eggs in buds early in the year. When the eggs hatch, the larvae eat and destroy the flower. You can recognise the affected buds by their fat, rounded shape. Pick them off and destroy them. The pest is most active early in the year, so later-flowering cultivars aren't as affected as early flowering ones.

Cooking with daylilies

Daylilies have been a popular ingredient in Chinese and Korean cuisine for centuries. The dried buds are sold in supermarkets throughout Asia under names such as Lilybud and Golden Needles and are used to flavour stews and soups or, rehydrated, used in place of fresh ones.

In Europe we have been slow to consider their culinary potential but

they do occasionally appear on the menus of daring chefs.

Their short shelf life means you are unlikely to find them in your local supermarket or even at a farmers' market. If you want to try them fresh, pick the buds before they begin to show the colour of the flower and cook them immediately. Sautéed in a light olive oil they have a fresh, peppery taste. Some people liken the taste to well-seasoned asparagus. The buds can also be steamed or stir-fried or eaten raw in salads. During the summer, the flowers can be added to salads (bringing more colour than taste) or stuffed like courgette flowers.

I have seen in some Asian cookbooks, recipes for daylily flowers deep fried in a tempura batter, something that is starting to appear on British restaurant menus. Some Asian recipe books also suggest using the young, juicy roots, but digging them up would obviously reduce the number of plants in your garden.

Societies

- **The American Hemerocallis Society**
daylilies.org
- **British Hosta and Hemerocallis Society**
hostahem.org.uk

Where to buy

- **A La Carte Daylilies**
A daylily breeder and nursery on the Isle of Wight. Sells its plants via mail order only.
alacartedaylilies.co.uk
- **Pollie's Daylilies**
Mount Pleasant Lane,
Lymington SO41 8LS.
Tel 01590 682577,
polliesdaylilies.co.uk
- **Strictly Daylilies,**
2 Primes Corner, Histon,
Cambridge CB24 9AG.
Tel 01223 236239,
strictlydaylilies.com
- **Wootens of Wenhamston,**
Blackheath, Halesworth,
Suffolk IP19 9HD.
Tel 01502 478258,
wootensplants.co.uk



H. 'CORAL SPIDER'

Sweetly scented flowers that are a sophisticated dark apricot with a creamy-gold central rib down each petal, and a golden-yellow throat. The flowers are 20cm wide. 1m. RHS H6, USDA 3a-9b.



H. 'LACY MARIONETTE'

Shining, yellow flowers that have a pale-green throat. The petals are extremely narrow and curl under at their tips. Flowers are 17cm wide on short stems. 60cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-10b.



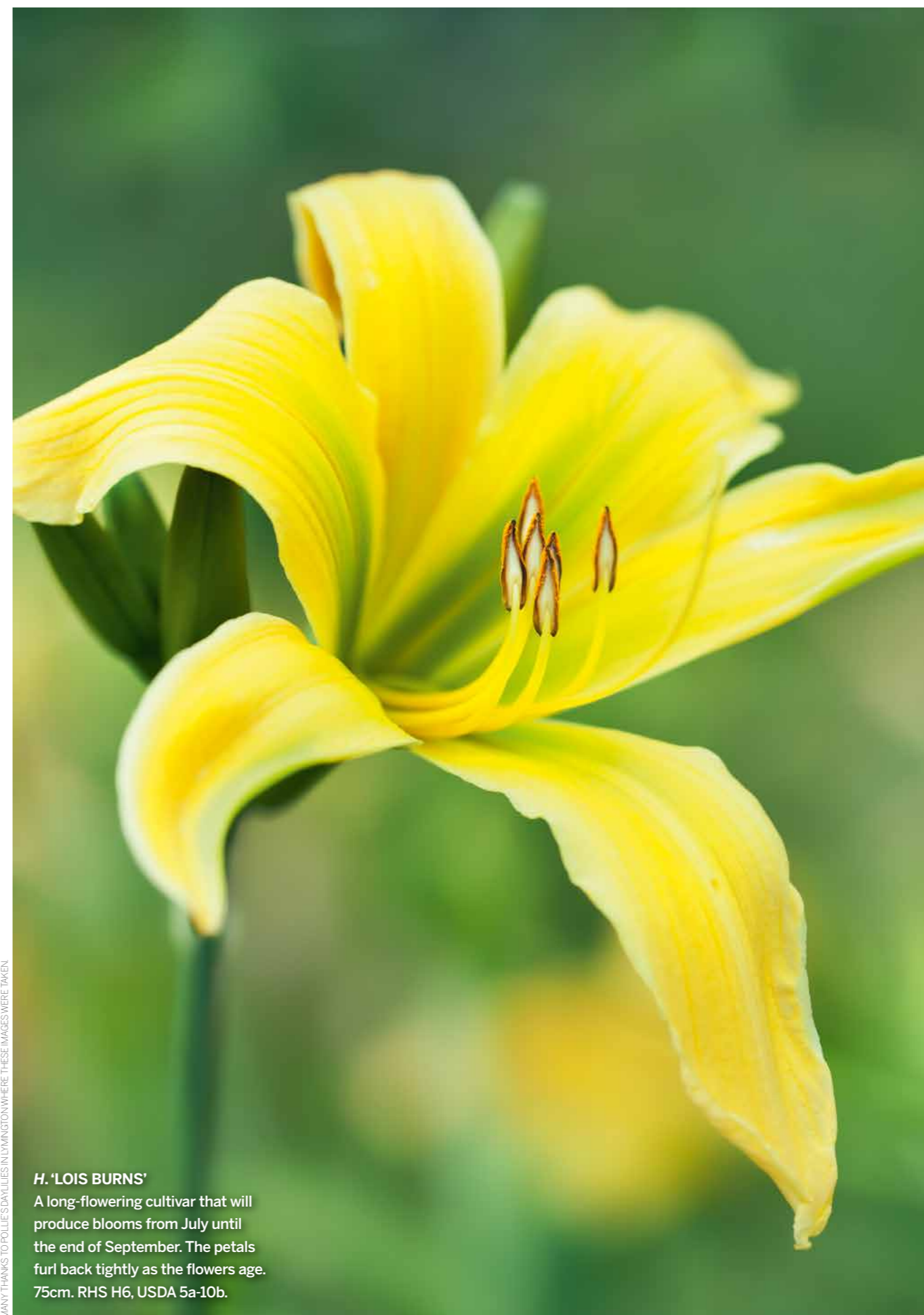
H. 'EMERALD LADY'

An early flowering cultivar with strongly scented flowers. The base of the petals are bright green, which blends well with the pale yellow of the flower. The edges of the petals are crimped. 90cm. RHS H6, USDA 4a-10b.



H. 'JURASSIC SPIDER'

This is a popular hybrid with pale, faded pink flowers that have a yellow centre. Starts flowering in June and continues into August. It is slow to increase. 80cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-9b.



H. 'LOIS BURNS'

A long-flowering cultivar that will produce blooms from July until the end of September. The petals furl back tightly as the flowers age. 75cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-10b.

MANY THANKS TO POLLIE'S DAYLILIES IN LYMINGTON WHERE THESE IMAGES WERE TAKEN