

# Daylily Scavenger Hunt – or Tips on Hosting Home School Children at Your Daylily Garden

*By Russ Allen, Region 4 Director*

When thinking back on the highlight of the past summer's daylily season, the visit to my garden by a group of home school children was clearly the highlight! This article is my attempt to share what made this such a marvelous memory and to share tips on how you might enjoy a similar experience in your daylily garden next summer.



**Background:** My daylily garden in southern Connecticut has been an American Daylily Society Display Garden for several years now - with about 350 registered cultivars. Through my participation in a local chapter of the Catholic Home School Network, I extended an invitation to all participating families to visit my three daylily gardens on a Friday during peak season in July. About 20 children ages 6-12 years old (plus parents and some toddlers) were able to participate in this Field Trip. For those not familiar with home school groups, many programs heavily focus on learning through family field trips to widely different venues in addition to “book learning”. Exposing children at an early age to the joy of gardening I think is quite important because, from a daylily “promotional standpoint”, how can you expect folks to fall in love with daylilies as adults if they never planted a flower or toured a flower garden when they were kids?

**Pre-Meeting Activities:** Before addressing the program of activities for these enthusiastic young visitors, I should mention a few logistical items. Once I learned of the anticipated size of the group, I obtained some more folding chairs so that most visitors could have a place to sit in the shade during the “presentation” elements of the visit. We also had to obtain about half as many folding TV tables which could be shared and would enable the kids to have a place to put flowers. We have regular tick control on our property so there was no concern in that area, and I arranged for a teenager to help me deadhead my garden so I could focus on other details. Oh yes, and it's a good idea to have a case of small water bottles on hand. The visit was scheduled for 9:30 AM – noon as most families would wish to go home for lunch.

## **Goals for the Daylily Garden Visit:**

There were several important objectives for the activities during the visit. It had to be a fun time for the children. They needed to learn about daylilies and have a memorable “hands-on” experience in the garden and not just listen to talks. The sit-down segments needed to be kept to about 15 minutes in length to maintain attention spans and the garden visits needed to be conducted safely.

**Agenda of Activities:** The visit was structured in the following way to optimize the scheduled visit:

- I. **Garden Welcome and Rules:** Once families arrived, we assembled and had an opening prayer and a volunteer adult led the standing children in a joyful song with hand motions. Then we asked folks to sit and we explained our garden visit rules:
  - Stay on the grass or specially marked one-way pathways through each garden
  - No running, as the ground is very uneven and we don't want anyone to trip and get hurt
  - Look where you are walking before looking at any flowers

We split the children into two groups so that one group would be seated and learn about daylilies while the other was visiting the gardens, and then reverse the roles.



Scavenger Hunt in Progress

**Daylily Overview Presentation:** The initial talk about daylilies used flip charts with a simple outline of topics to briefly discuss:

- the Greek name *hemerocallis* meaning “beauty for a day”
- how to spell daylily
- what is a perennial
- where did daylilies originate
- the earliest daylilies were only yellow and orange
- 90,000+ registered daylilies
- what is the American Daylily Society
- what is needed to grow daylilies (sun, soil, water, pest control)
- buds are edible and appealing to deer (which led to having a deer fence)
- peak bloom season
- how to pick a daylily bloom (demonstration by volunteers)

The best audience reaction was when I pointed out that every single flower blooming today in the garden today would close up after dinner, and tomorrow a new set would open just as beautiful as today’s flowers. Typical exclamations included “Really?” “Wow!” “Incredible!” “Amazing!” “Every flower?” Other comments included: “Can we visit

the gardens now?”, and “Does it hurt the plant to pick a flower?” and “God sure created so many beautiful flowers!”

II. **First Garden Visit:** Children were asked to walk carefully through all three gardens following the arrows on the ground so they would know how to navigate their next garden visit. They were also asked to identify their **favorite** daylily in the whole garden and pick one flower to bring back to their seat which had a paper plate for them to use. I particularly enjoyed blowing on a high pitched whistle to call teams back from their garden visit to swap places with those sitting for the opening presentation on daylilies. The whistle worked like a charm!



"Brightest Red Daylily" (H.Heavenly United We Stand)

III. **Daylily Hybridizing Presentation:** Upon returning from their garden visit, a brief talk was given about how daylilies make seeds. Next, each child was asked to pick one stamen from their selected flower and touch pollen to the stigma of the flower. I then explained that fertilized flowers will usually develop seeds which can be planted and after a cold period will create a new seedling which may vary widely from the original parents. The parts of the daylily were briefly pointed out on a dug-up fan (e.g., roots, crown, leaves, scape, flower, petals, buds, etc.) along with a demonstration of how to plant a bare root cultivar in the ground. Then it was time to

announce the **Daylily Scavenger Hunt** with each group split into teams of five children.

IV. **Scavenger Hunt:** We had printed out scavenger hunt challenges and cut them into small pieces of paper each with a separate challenge – and handed five challenges to each team. The challenges were simple but very exciting to the kids especially given the three gardens they would need to visit during their search. Once they found the flower which best met their search objective, they were asked to pick one flower to show to the group. Sample scavenger hunt challenges included: largest daylily, smallest daylily, lightest color, darkest color, most ruffled, most petals, most unusual, brightest red, cutest pink, most lavender, assorted other specific colors, boldest colored eye zone (throat), prettiest double daylily, etc. ...you get the idea! When the kids returned with their chosen blooms, they would hold them delicately with two fingers and had facial expressions as if they were holding an enchanted mushroom from a Disney fairy tale!

V. **Concluding Session:** The final session involved each team having a member hold up a bloom of the daylily which best met their search challenge for everyone to see and “Ooh!” and “Ahhh!” about. After thanking everyone for their visit, a free bare root daylily was given to each child to plant at home. This generated quite a buzz of excitement as they made plans on where to plant their fans when they got home.

**Keys to the Successful Visit:** Looking back on the day’s visit, some of the things which made everyone have such a wonderful time included:

- Having a shady place for visitors to sit when discussing daylilies was very helpful particularly for the young children.
- Young kids thought it was fun find their way through the garden by following the one-way silver tape arrows on the ground
- Asking any visitor to look for their *favorite* flower made a sudden impact as now they realized that they would be challenged to think about what characteristics appealed to them *the most* and to *compare* between flowers in order

to select their favorite.

- Tying in daylily discussion to classroom learning goals (like new vocabulary, correct spelling of words, team decision-making, public speaking, etc.) fit well with the goals of the home school program.
- Having each child select their favorite flower, pick it, and then share it with their family resulted in each child needing to carefully focus their attention on this task.
- Providing a paper plate on which to bring home their picked blooms so they could watch them close up after dinner (without water!) was also a great idea – as many kids said they wanted to “watch their flowers close” that evening
- Using the scavenger hunt format was a fun way to have everyone appreciate the differences between daylilies, while also learning to work as a team and verbally share their findings with the group
- Having each child do the hybridizing exercise on a flower appealed to them a lot as they each got to personally touch the delicate flowers and concentrate to try to get the pollen where it belonged.
- Giving visitors a bare root daylily to plant at home proved very popular as it gave them a way to translate their learning from the day into something tangible that would be a surprise when it finally bloomed at home.

As a display garden owner I must confess that I’ve never had so much fun as watching these wonderful children learn and share insights and express gleeful remarks about daylilies – which made it the highlight of my summer’s open garden experiences. As families departed we received many words of appreciation for sharing our garden with them, along with frequent comments like “Our kids had so much fun, can we come again next year?” Our answer, of course, was an emphatic “Yes!”

**Final Word of Advice to Daylily Garden Owners:** No matter what the size of your daylily garden, please consider inviting local families with kids or a local home school group to visit your garden next summer! You won’t regret it!