



Expectations Exceeded at Great Expectations Daylilies

Article by Winnie Garabis and Rae Dickens, Ohio
Photos courtesy of Brian Norcross, Ohio

Rae and Delmar Dickens of Great Expectations Daylilies

Rae and Delmar Dickens were not looking for daylilies. Daylilies found them.

Eighteen years ago, Rae and Delmar Dickens transitioned from city life to Montville, Ohio, a rural community located in Geauga County near Amish country. One day while out and about, they came across a place called “Jonathan Ford’s Rock Bottom Farms” in Middlefield that was loaded with daylilies. They were amazed at the riot of color and the number of varieties available. They purchased plants that day that flourished and needless to say, they were hooked. Rae and Delmar made many trips back and forth from their home to Rock Bottom Farms. The number of choices was so overwhelming that they would spend a day only picking reds, then go back the next day and look at purples, then pinks and yellows. Unfortunately, they didn’t recognize the importance of keeping track of the names until the next season when they made the pilgrimage and didn’t know which plants they already had.

Rae and Delmar started collecting in 2005 and currently have over 1,000 varieties of registered cultivars. It’s obviously a hobby that they both enjoy. They continue to create new beds, add new plants and edit out the older ones. They leave adequate space between plants so visitors can evaluate the entire plant and easily step in to take pictures. They keep the garden looking fresh by finding sources to purchase newer varieties, have all forms available, and grow plants by a variety of hybridizers. Although they have some historic daylilies on site, their plants primarily range from the registration year 2000 forward.



The garden is named after the classic novel written by Charles Dickens, a nod to their last name.

They joined the American Hemerocallis Society (AHS) in 2007 and it was just 4 years until they registered to become an AHS Display Garden in 2011. They wanted to share the beauty and versatility of daylilies with other gardeners. Rae and Delmar had also started a new club (Western Reserve Daylily

Society) and felt it was important for at least one club member to have an AHS Display Garden to show people how daylilies can be used in the landscape. They wanted to show people how daylilies grow rather than just sharing pictures or blooms on plant scapes.

Before applying to become an AHS Display Garden, they reviewed the criteria and made sure their garden met the requirements. The Dickens’ use PlantStep as the database for their plants, so filling out the application form was pretty easy. When asked to choose their favorite daylily characteristics, here’s what they had to say:

- Rae prefers singles, but doubles run a close second. She favors purples and pinks and likes unique flowers - ones that can be recognized without looking at the name tag.
- Delmar favors flowers with big eyes and saturated bold colors.

Great Expectations has plenty of other plants on display. There is a shade garden with a variety of Hostas, Hellebores, Epimediums and hardy Fuschia. They also grow a collection of the newer varieties of Echinacea and incorporate them with daylilies in a cottage garden style. They feature several varieties of Asiatic and Oriental lilies and love the vertical element of Asiatics, Lupines and Delphiniums. Phlox is available in a nice array of colors and fills in spaces well. Rae and Delmar like the unusual blooms of hardy Alstroemeria and hardy Agapanthus. Lisianthus creates a nice soft touch, and they love the pretty bouquets that Dianthus make for a border. Clematis makes a beautiful backdrop. The garden also features several varieties of Itoh Peonies and new varieties of Hydrangea.

Prior to the passing of Roy Woodhall, the Dickens’ were able to purchase a number of garden sculptures from Moldovan Gardens and add them to their garden. You’ll also find an unusual fairy garden where miniature plants including miniature daylilies look charming.

Delmar is hybridizing and seedling beds are kept separate from the other plants and are labeled accordingly. A number of interesting seedlings are currently under evaluation.





Great Expectation Daylilies is not a commercial garden. They don't sell on the lily auction or have a mail order website with a catalog. If they have enough of a cultivar that a garden visitor is interested in, they will dig and sell some of the plant. They participate in the spring sale at the Holden Arboretum where they donate 20% of their sales to the Arboretum. They also keep things in check by providing generous plant donations to the WRDS Club Plant Sales.

Rae and Delmar enjoy sharing their garden with others. A number of garden clubs tour the garden each season. Most of their visitors are new to hybrid daylilies and are not aware of AHS until they share information about the Society with them. About 25 people from the Holden Arboretum plant sale visit annually and they've even

had a number of customers from Western Reserve Daylily Society's Plant Sales visit to see daylilies growing in the landscape. The garden also has repeat visitors that return each year to see how the garden has changed and to see the new plants that have been added. They estimate that an additional 30-50 people outside of these groups visit the garden each year.

It's fun to see visitor's eyes light up when they come to the garden. Upon arrival, they see the beds in the front and can't wait to get out of the car. Then, when they walk around the side of the house and see how many more plants there are, they are amazed! Until they see the garden, these visitors have no idea how beautiful, versatile, and unusual daylilies are. They are surprised to learn that daylilies can grow and thrive in full sun, partial sun, and filtered sun. In addition to formal beds, the garden shows visitors how nooks and crannies can be used to successfully grow daylilies.

The Dickens' consider the biggest benefit of being an AHS Display Garden to be the opportunity to let people see how daylilies have changed, how versatile they are in the landscape, how many colors and forms are available, and the beautiful intricate features of each flower. It is really rewarding to inspire someone to start a daylily garden or to show someone how to hybridize and create their own new flowers. We are lucky to have them as an AHS Display Garden.

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The visitors were the Friendly Garden Club from Trumbull County, Ohio.

