

# Sharing A Hobby- With Each Other and Their Visitors

By Sandra Dunn, based on conversations with Rae Dickens



Rae and Delmar Dickens' Great Expectations Daylily Garden is located at their home in northeastern Ohio. The gardens are a joint effort for Rae and Delmar. They appreciate how lovely it is to share this hobby with each other. As Rae described, "We both have our individual pastimes. But it is really nice that daylilies are a major hobby for both of us, something we can share together." They also love to share their love of daylilies with their many visitors and customers.

Great Expectations became an ADS Display Garden in 2011. Former Great Lakes Daylily editor Winnie Garabis wrote a lovely article about the gardens in 2015. Rather than recap the basics here, readers can easily find that article on the Dickens' user-friendly website: [greatexpectationsdaylilies.com](http://greatexpectationsdaylilies.com). Scroll down to the bottom of the home page. You can also find a drone-shot garden video on their website.

For this article, I was interested in the changes Rae and Del have observed in their eleven years as a display garden. In their own garden, they have opted to focus on more modern daylilies. They moved out all but a few of their older cultivars, selling them or donating them to daylily club sales. Rae and Del add new plants each year, reflecting their own different tastes in daylilies. While their garden features creations from over 100 different hybridizers, they are especially fond of plants from Guy Pierce and fellow northeast Ohioan Curt Hanson. With this focus on collecting new introductions, their catalog (available on their website) has a bright and fresh appearance.

Another change is that Rae and Del have reduced their named cultivars from 900 to 800 to make room for their own seedlings. At present, they have 15 introductions between them, two of which are featured on the next page.

The Dickens chose to become a display garden to promote daylilies. When people visit our garden or website they often want to bring some of our flowers into their own gardens. To make room for new varieties in our Display Garden, keep plants healthy, and to make these extraordinary plants available to gardeners, excess plants can be dug and sold directly from the Display Garden to garden visitors or through mail order requests.

Over the years, they have shared their love of daylilies in a variety of ways. Local garden clubs have visited. They have been featured on a local television show and in their local newspaper. But word of mouth is still the primary way that people hear about them. The connections that Rae and Del make with visitors are their favorite part of being a display garden. Rae shared that "What we have noticed about visitors coming to the garden is that they typically buy what is in bloom. They like to pick out the varieties that speak to them and take them home and put them in their landscape. They like having us there to talk to and answer questions. It's very personal."



Left to right:

'Girls Who Love Horses'  
Del Dickens, 2021

'Shameless Beauty'  
Rae Dickens, 2020

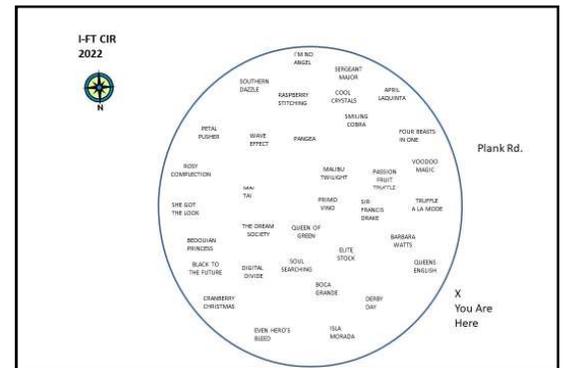


Part of this connection is having the time to answer people's individual questions. Rae and Del shared with me a few of the most common inquiries they receive. Their answers may be of interest to our readers as well.

### 1. How do you keep track of everything?

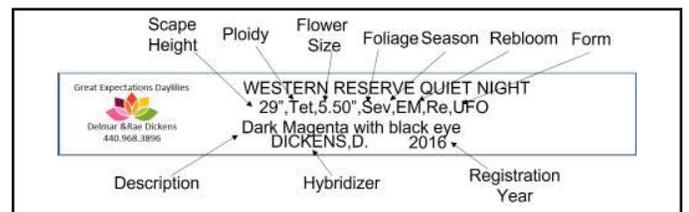
As Rae puts it, "Names are important." She and Del have noticed that many people new to daylilies don't care too much about daylily names. They don't realize initially how important it is to be able to identify a specific daylily. She noted that she was initially the same way but that changed when she wanted to add more of a specific daylily she grew and did not know its name. As most of us know, identifying a daylily after the fact is often an impossible task. Rae and Del also encourage their visitors to make sure that whatever method they choose for labels is durable.

Another organization strategy is to make a map of each bed. If labels do fail, you can still identify specific plants. Rae transfers the maps to Power Point so that she can update them as plants are added or moved around (example, right). She saves the maps from each year so that if a stray fan of something left behind shows up, she can use prior maps to identify it.



Finally, Rae highly recommends Plantstep software as an organizational tool. Not only does the software provide a database for plant information, but with Plantstep, Rae can export information to Excel and merge it into a Word file to make labels for their annual sale plants that include helpful information for customers once the Ditmers explain how to read the tag. Please note in the example to the right that this daylily is not a rebloomer, nor a UF, but these are included here to show the range of information that can be exported.

### 2. How do you keep the weeds out?



The Dickens highly recommend planting in raised beds, putting daylilies at a different level from the surrounding grass. They clean their beds well in the fall. Even though they are typically exhausted at the end of the season, they weed everything so that beds look as good in October as they do after weeding in the spring.

With so many beds to care for, Rae explained that their strategy is to weed section by section. They then add two to three inches of mulch right away to the newly-weeded area. During bloom season, Rae describes herself as "the weed police." She spends at least two days each week walking the beds, just looking for weeds, and pulling them on the spot.

Rae offered one more piece of advice to help reduce weeds. When adding new daylilies, if they are not sold bareroot wash the soil from the daylily before you plant it so you don't inadvertently introduce new weeds to your garden.

### 3. How do you make a new variety?

Rae and Del love talking with people about their shared hobby. Many guests to their garden are curious about hybridizing. So Rae and Del frequently do demonstrations, encouraging visitors to make their own crosses so they can see how simple the actual process is. But then Rae and Del talk in depth with guests about the long process that comes afterward, from harvesting seeds to the two or three year wait to see a bloom.



### 4. What about deer?

Visitors often ask about protection from deer damage. The Dickens don't face this problem directly because their daylily beds are fenced and their dogs roam the property to deter them. But they have created a flyer to share with visitors tips they have heard from others, such as the use of Milorganite. Rae also introduced me to 'feather meal,' which I had never heard of, perhaps because I am a vegetarian. Feather meal is a byproduct of processing chickens for meat. The feathers are ground using heat and pressure, then dried. Feather meal is a lightweight, nitrogen-rich product that can be applied directly to daylily leaves after a rain. Deer are apparently repelled by the smell, which is not necessarily noticeable to humans. Rae did note that after applied, the foliage has a dusty look. Rae stressed how easy using feather meal is to use. She noted that "you don't need anything like a hazmat suit to use it. You just shake it over the plant or use a flower sifter."

### 5. What's the difference between older flowers and newer varieties?

As Rae explained: "What people typically see in garden centers and mail order companies are varieties that are older, but people don't realize it. They often offer varieties as "new." People think that means it is a brand new variety, but it is not necessarily new to the public. What the store is really saying is it is new to their garden line up, not a true new variety. When daylily folks talk about a new variety they mean registered and recently released into commerce. Without coming to our garden, website, or annual plant sale, visitors often don't realize how hard hybridizers have worked to improve and create amazing unique flowers for people to enjoy."



Left to right: 'Dedicated Follower of Fashion' (Rae Dickens, 2020), 'Western Reserve Quiet Night' (Del Dickens, 2016), 'Montville Sweetie' (Del Dickens, 2018)

6. What kind of fertilizer do you use?

Rae's answer to this question was my favorite, likely because it is my own answer: "Whatever is on sale. Daylilies will appreciate whatever you give them." Rae did add that when she plants new flowers in the garden, she amends the soil and mixes in a time release fertilizer.

Closing thoughts from Rae and Del

"Although it's a lot of work to have a beautiful garden we'd do it all over again. We enjoy being outside and walking the garden to see what is blooming on any given day. Making new crosses is a lot of fun. It's enjoyable to anticipate what the new flowers might look like and is exciting to see a brand new daylily that is being seen for the very first time. Additionally, we enjoy photographing both the garden and the flowers and sharing the images with others. It's also very nice to look through your pictures when it's cold and snowy outside in the winter. Daylilies offer something for everyone. You can decide how deep you want to get into it."



*Above, left to right: Rae and Del in their garden. The porch garden. Below: Selected seedlings under evaluation.*



### Contact Information

Garden Name: Great Expectations Daylilies

Location: Montville, Ohio 44064 (Geauga County)

Owners: Rae and Delmar Dickens

Website: [greatexpectationsdaylilies.com](http://greatexpectationsdaylilies.com)

Email: [greatexpectations.daylily@gmail.com](mailto:greatexpectations.daylily@gmail.com)

Please email to schedule an appointment to visit

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