

What to do during the off season!

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It's winter, and the daylilies are all snug in their beds until spring. We have a long, impatient wait ahead. What can we do in the meantime? Well, the opportunities are endless!

My first suggestion is to make sure everything is labelled, mapped and recorded. Some will find this boring, but if you do take the time to do this, you will be able to answer a lot of your own important questions:

- I really like this one; what is its name? (Read the label!)
- I can't find the label; what is the name of this daylily? (Check your map!)
- Do I have this daylily already? (Check your list!)

None of these are difficult, and as your collection grows, you will need these more and more. Mapping your beds can be done with crude sketches on paper or using fancy drawing apps on your computer. Keeping a recorded list of the daylilies you have can be done on paper. If you want to use your computer, you can use a text document, spreadsheet, or database depending on what you like best.

Labels are a bit trickier because they need to resist sun, rain, and gardeners. Wooden labels rot, many plastic labels become brittle and break, and some labels are easily pulled out when raking or by foraging turkeys, deer, dog, cats, and other animals. One simple, cheap system that I use is cutting up slats of vinyl venetian blinds and writing on them with a paint marker. If you want to get fancy, you can use a spreadsheet to laser print onto clear adhesive labels (which go onto the blinds or metal markers.)

The off season is an ideal time for socializing in your local club, research and learning (maybe even all at the same time). Most clubs make a point of interacting with new members to make them feel at home, but there's no reason why you shouldn't just strike up conversations with anybody, because you have a common interest! Almost everybody loves to help beginners,

even the most distinguished members. Ask them how they do things. Find people you like, nearby gardens, good sources for daylilies, how to care for daylilies, where to get supplies, you name it. If you want to feel you belong in your club, then participate: take an office or join a committee, maybe give a talk or lead a question and answer session. In my club, we try to get new members involved as fast as possible because they know well what is important for the other new members. If you need help, that's fine: it is a great way to get to know the more experienced members, and they will be committed to making you and the club succeed.

Fall and winter are ideal times to research daylilies. You can read back issues of *The Daylily Journal*, borrowing them from club libraries or other members. You can explore the AHS website. AHS is publishing new books, and a brand new update is now available which is especially helpful for beginners: *The Illustrated Guide to Daylilies*. In it, the gardening basics from preparing a garden bed for daylilies to the latest information on pests and diseases are discussed. (Find out how to get yours by turning to page %.)

There are plenty of daylily forums, auction sites, blogs, and personal web sites. One of my favorites is The Hybridizer's Corner (<http://daylilydiary.com/gardenHybridC.htm>) where Charlotte Chamitoff has links to hundreds of hybridizer websites. You could also start your own blog or web site; it is easy.

But your research doesn't have to be about just daylilies. You can research general gardening issues such as where to get your soil tested, how to amend your soil, what to grow with your daylilies, how to control deer or weeds and a host of other common gardening questions.

The off season is also time to plan. Think about the bones of your garden: the hardscaping (paths, rocks, furniture, decorations), the trees and the shrubs. For those in deciduous climates, it is easier to see the bones in the winter. What do you

Spectacular hardscape in Dave Mussar's Canadian garden.
— Mike Huben photo



Raised beds and brick pathways make this New York garden a pleasing destination.

— Mike Huben photo

need? What do you want to get rid of? What do you want to move? Where will your next beds go, or do you need to reduce the size or number of beds to something manageable?

If you want to hybridize, what crosses do you want to make? What plants do you need to buy, and where will you grow the seedlings?

Do you want to photograph? Then you might need to plan on a good camera besides your smartphone, one that has better macro or zoom features. You can plan if you need a watering system. Daydream away, and pick the ones you can do.

And finally, the off season is a great time to do numerous things. If you need trees felled to let in more light, why do it in the growing season when your plants might get damaged?

You can buy and start daylily seed. Lots of people sell seed from exciting crosses. You can grow seedlings of annuals and perennials to share beds with your daylilies. You can plant bulbs. You can order plants for spring. You can make your labels, maps and records. You can inventory and stock up on supplies such as fertilizers and mulch.

Our off seasons don't have to be idle. We can enjoy as many pleasures (and chores) as we'd like, each to their season. Some gardeners want activity year-round, and daylilies can provide it even when they are out of season. ■