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'Stella de Oro' (Jablonski, 1975)
— Linda Sue Barnes photo



'Monica Marie'
(Gates-L., 1982)

'Early and Often' (Huben, 2001)

Selecting and Achieving

Part 1: A personal example

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Until recently, I had a well-thought-out set of breeding goals that were right for my tastes, climate, soil, gardening style and customers. But now that I am emigrating from Massachusetts to Ecuador, it is time to rethink the whole thing. Since I need to select new breeding goals, I thought I'd develop my thoughts by writing a small series of stories. I'll start with the history of my New England goals.

Like all new members of the Daylily Society, when I began growing daylilies I experimented. I wanted to know what I could grow, and how well it could grow. I saw all the beautiful pictures in *The Daylily Journal* and catalogs, and I coveted those daylilies. I couldn't afford to buy the newest, so I tried older varieties. I quickly found that my poor, sandy soil was alright, though the daylilies didn't increase rapidly. And worst of all, the daylily season was so brief for me! Just two weeks of peak and a dribble of off-peak flowers.

I was excited to learn about reblooming daylilies, and quickly bought some, but they did not rebloom for me. Even 'Stella de Oro' (Jablonski, 1975) took three years to establish before it rebloomed in my yard's unimproved soil. Still, I was getting some very pretty flowers: 'Monica Marie' (Gates-L., 1982) stood out as a favorite for its beautiful green throat, near-white color and round, ruffled form.

My obvious conclusion was that if daylilies didn't do what I wanted, I should breed some that did. I decided to breed for



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northern rebloom like (or better than) 'Stella de Oro', with color and form like 'Monica Marie'. I was also confident that other colors easily would spin off as I progressed. But would anybody buy such a daylily? When I visited nurseries, I overheard 'Stella de Oro' being sold as a rebloomer, and the first thing customers asked was, "Does it come in other colors?" That answered my question.

As I began hybridizing and grew more experienced, I realized that I'd never be able to profitably increase any daylilies in my soil, let alone my own daylilies, unless they increased as rapidly as 'Stella De Oro'. That was added to my breeding goal. It occurred to me that to get a long season, I had to start early; that became yet another aspect of my breeding goal.

I started with one goal, and kept that my primary goal for twenty years and roughly 10,000 seedlings over that period. But along the way, I kept exploring different kinds of daylilies I was coming up with, and experimenting with improving anything that dissatisfied me. Extra early (EE) daylilies (in the north) were almost all yellow, brief bloomers, and/or ugly, so I added EE as a separate goal, with the intention of using my results to move rebloomers earlier.

Reds were not sunfast enough to satisfy me; most turned brown when the sun hit them, so I started a red program. Tall daylilies were mostly yellow and few and far between, but very useful in perennial borders, so I started a goal for tall-and-small reds and whites.

Species daylilies had beautiful, simple wildflower-like looks, but they came primarily in yellow and orange, so I started a goal for wildflower-like daylilies in melon and white.

'Gabriel's Weathervane' (Turner-C., 2006) had an extreme trumpet appearance no other daylily had, so I started breeding for it in different colors. I started a goal of early-blooming bud builders that could bloom all season on one set of scapes as an



'Gabriel's Weathervane' (Turner-C., 2006)

'Sir Blackstem' (Hager, 1988)

'Nutmeg Elf' (McCabe, 1978)
— Susan Okrasinski photo

— All photos courtesy of the hybridizer unless noted otherwise

ving Breeding Goals

alternative to rebloom. Inspired by the dark scapes of 'Sir Blackstem' (Hager, 1988), I decided to breed for better dark scapes with colors other than gold.

All the additional goals had to be shoehorned in to my annual production of 1000 seedlings. Usually, almost half were for rebloom, and perhaps a hundred for each other goal, depending on seed production. No goal truly ended; even when I was successful, there was always room for improvement. And I did have successes.

Because I was breeding and selecting in very poor soil and garden conditions, when my plants went to other gardens, they would increase much faster, and bloom and rebloom better. For example, my first introduction, 'Early and Often' (Huben, 2001), would send

up three sets of scapes for me. However, Mike Derrow reported seven sets of scapes in his West Virginia garden. Breeding under ideal growing conditions is a mistake in my opinion, since you won't know how your plants will do elsewhere.

I first achieved strong rebloomers that started early with blooms up to eleven weeks in my garden, and succeeded in eliminating the yellow in some. I did achieve my first near-white northern rebloomer in about seven years — 'Ace Up My Sleeve' (Huben, 2010) — and have progressed another three generations or so, resulting in 'Vanilla Stella' (Huben, 2009), 'Accentuate the Green' (Huben, 2013) and others, plus seedlings such as MH1118C. None are as beautiful as 'Monica Marie' — yet.



'Ace up my Sleeve' (Huben, 2010)



'Vanilla Stella' (Huben, 2009)



'Accentuate the Green'
(Huben, 2013)



Mike Huben seedling MH1118C

However, I also have rebloomers in several colors now such as 'Magenta Kisses' (Huben, 2013), 'Ethereal Pink' (Huben, 2016) and seedling MH0936A. My rebloomers have sold well, though none on the scale of Darrell Apps' reblooming introductions such as 'Rosy Returns' (Apps, 1999).

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'Magenta Kisses' (010)



'Ethereal Pink' (2016)



Mike Huben seedling
MH0936A

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Most of my breeding lines tend to the early, but my extra-early goal resulted in a several daylilies that bloom up to two weeks before 'Stella de Oro', are pretty, and are not yellow, such as 'Begin with a Bang' (Huben, 2009), and 'Commence' (Huben, 2016).

The dark-scapes goal also resulted in some extra earlys, where I've succeeded in breeding melon on my way to white. The best example is 'Halloween Darkness' (Huben, 2016). But I'm not discarding yellows when they are particularly good plants, such as the very floriferous seedling MH0966X.

I've bred some tall-and-small daylilies in yellow, melon, white, red, purple and pink with high budcounts and exceptional branching, such as 'A Small Multitude' (Huben, 2010), 'Height Of Fashion' (Huben, 2012), 'Paean for Jocelyn' (Huben, 2013), 'Umpty Kajillion' (Huben, 2010), 'Venous Blood' (Huben, 2011), 'Fountain of Blood' (2012), and 'Way Up There' (Huben, 2015). Some of the reds are extremely sunfast: most notably 'O Positive' (Huben, 2013).



'Begin with a Bang' (2009)



'Commence' (2016)



'Halloween Darkness' (2016)



Mike Huben seedling
MH0966X



'A Small Multitude' (2010)



'Height of Fashion' (2012)



'Paean for Jocelyn' (2013)



'Umpty Kajillion' (2010)



'Venous Blood' (2011)



'Fountain of Blood' (2012)



'Way Up There' (2015)



'O Positive' (2013)



'Seeker of Light' (2015)



Mike Huben seedling MH1115X



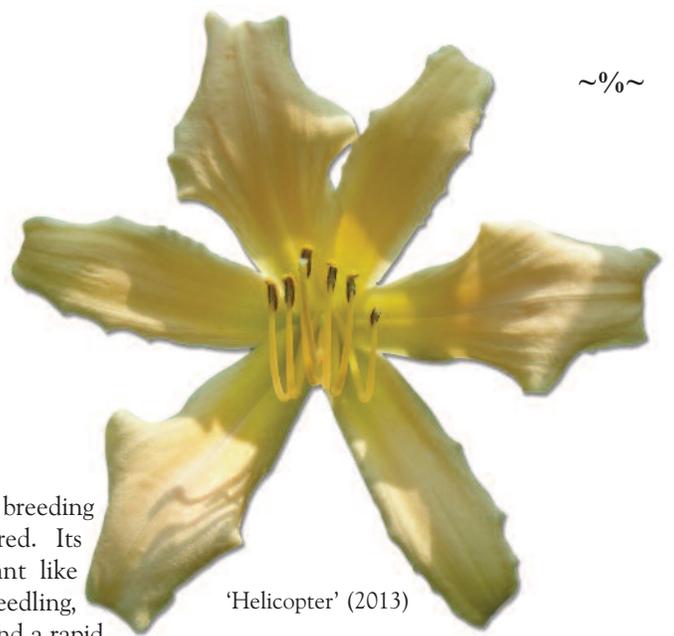
'Vanilla Gorilla'
(2008)

The wildflower-look goal so far has resulted in 'Seeker of Light' (Huben, 2015) and recently the reblooming MH1115X.

Along the way, I've also had some happy accidents from simply playing around, such as 'Vanilla Gorilla' (Huben, 2008), which won an Honorable Mention award.



Mike Huben seedling MH1331E Mike Huben seedling MH1310.27



'Helicopter' (2013)

I was attempting to breed for nodding blooms, but I found a whole new breeding goal in mini spidery rebloomers when 'Helicopter' (Huben, 2013) appeared. Its offspring, MH1331E, has fulfilled one of my long-term dreams: a plant like 'Nutmeg Elf' (McCabe, 1978) but a rebloomer in white. Another special seedling, MH1310.27, is precocial (it bloomed in less than six months from seed) and a rapid increaser. I've been saving other precocial seedlings over the years, and now I can start a new line.

A few goals I don't consider really finished. None of my introductions have achieved commercial success, though that is a marketing goal and not a breeding goal. I'm not yet happy with the dark scapes; the darkness fades under conditions I don't really understand, and the flowers are not yet white. I've got a few bud builders, but they are not yet long blooming enough, pretty enough, or early enough to suit me. Extreme trumpet forms in purple and white (MH1190E) have bloomed, but they might not be good enough plants.

I'm happy with the results of my 20 years of hybridizing, but it's time to pass my breeding program on to others and choose new goals. Instead of being a northern breeder, I'm going to be a southern breeder — an EXTREME southern breeder. I live in the city of Quito now (on the equator at roughly 10,000 feet), where the temperature varies between 50 degrees F and 80 degrees F year round, never colder, never hotter. There's a dry season, but no winter. I have no idea



Mike Huben seedling MH1190E

how any U.S. daylilies will perform here; so far, I've only seen a few species-like varieties. I don't really know anything about these new conditions except that there is wide-open opportunity!

Choosing new breeding goals will be an interesting challenge, which I'll explore further in my next story. But my current thoughts include relaxing my emphasis on diploids, small flowers and dormants, looking for year 'round bloom (when watered), and testing daylily growth habits in the various climates of Ecuador.

Daylilies are not the only plants I might breed; Ecuador has many native flowers that are truly exciting such as *Brugmansia sanguinea*, the Angel's Trumpets.

More next time!



Brugmansia sanguinea

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