

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

	University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment Cooperative Extension Service
	extension.ca.uky.edu <b>HORTICULTURE EDUCATION</b>
	<b>Annette Meyer Heisdorffer, PhD</b> Daviness County Extension Office

July 06, 2024

**Dividing Daffodils, Irises, and Daylilies for Improved Performance**  
**By Annette Meyer Heisdorffer, Ph.D.**  
**Extension Agent for Horticulture Education – Daviess County**

What is happening when daffodil, bearded iris, and daylily flowers begin to decrease in number and size? This was evident in my garden this spring with fewer daffodil flowers and many leaves. This is crowding from continual growth, and means they need to be divided. Dividing them promotes growth, vigor, and optimum flower production. By dividing and replanting iris and daylilies in late summer, they have an opportunity to establish roots before winter.

During July and August, the roots of daffodils (*Narcissus*) have not started to grow or are starting to appear outside the bottom of the bulb. This is a good time to divide them.

Lift the bulbs with a spading fork and separate the offsets. The big ones will bloom next year. Foliage emerges from the smaller bulbs but no flowers appear until the bulb reaches a blooming size. Discard shriveled, dark, or diseased bulbs. Keep the brown paper-like covering on the bulbs to keep them from drying out and dying.

Daffodils are a spring-blooming plant and can be replanted now. If that's not possible,

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

keep them in a cool dry place until they can be planted in the fall. Bulbs should be planted 4 to 8 inches apart depending on the mature bulb size, which depends on the cultivar. Plant the bulb at a depth of two to three times the size of the bulb.

On the bearded iris, a fan of sword-like foliage is produced on rhizomes. Rhizomes are enlarged, underground horizontal stems located at or just below soil level. Each fan tends to bloom only once. Room is needed for new fans to grow and bloom properly.

Dig up a clump with a spading fork or shovel. Try to avoid digging into the rhizomes. Shake off soil from the clump or wash it off if needed. Divide the clump by cutting through the rhizome with a sharp knife. A division could contain two or three fans, but make sure there is at least one fan and some good roots on each rhizome. Throw away old, spindly, and soft rhizomes.

Cut the leaves back to half or one-third of their length with sharp scissors. This reduces the surface area where water is lost. Cut back damaged roots also.

Bearded iris grows best in full sun and well-drained soil. When ready to plant, dig two shallow holes, leaving a dividing ridge in the center. Place the rhizome directly over the center of the ridge, spread the roots to either side, and add soil with the upper surface of the rhizome at or near ground level, then water thoroughly.

Individual rhizomes can be planted in groupings. The spacing between individual rhizomes should be about 8 to 12 inches apart. Usually, three are used to start a new clump. Arrange the group of three in a triangle. Two rhizomes should be planted with the fan of leaves facing out so new growth develops outward. The third one is placed with the fan of leaves pointed into the space between the other two rhizomes so that it fills into the center of the

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

triangle. The clumps of three should be spaced about 18 to 24 inches apart.

Daylilies may become overgrown after five or six years. You may begin to notice the clump producing fewer flowers. They can be divided as they emerge from the soil in the spring, but also in late summer to early fall. They are divided into fans. Daylily fans are small plants which are made up of fibrous roots, a growing point called a crown, and leaves. Each fan produces another fan.

To divide daylilies, loosen the clump around the outside with a spading fork; dig down into the soil about 12 inches deep and lift out the clump. The spading fork helps to avoid cutting into the fibrous roots.

Next, shake the soil loose or wash it away. Cut the foliage back to about 6 inches in length to help reduce water stress after planting.

Begin to separate the mass by pulling or cutting apart sections into smaller pieces. Discard older woody fans. Pieces with three to four fans of foliage with strong roots quickly make a nice display in the garden. Pieces with one or two fans and good roots planted back take longer to make a display, but also take longer before dividing is needed again.

Daylilies prefer full sun and well-drained soil. They will grow in partial shade but produce fewer flowers. The fan should be planted with the crown at the depth it was originally in the soil. Cover the roots with soil and water the plants thoroughly.

For more information about dividing daffodils, bearded irises, and daylilies contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service or [annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu](mailto:annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu).

**Annette's Tips:**

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

Spider mites are tiny and can be pests of ornamental and vegetable plants, especially during hot dry weather. Short bursts of water on the leaves knock many of them off. Following up with insecticidal soap more than once helps. Read label directions. Do not apply it when the temperature is at 90 degrees F or above.

## **Upcoming Events:**

Consider entering your fruits, vegetables, cut flowers, and herbs in the Daviess County Lions Club Fair. Information about requirements for entries for youth and adult categories is available at the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office or online at <https://daviess.ca.uky.edu/dc-fair>. Entries need to be delivered on Tuesday, July 16, from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. to the fairgrounds in Philpot.

The Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment is an Equal Opportunity Organization with respect to education and employment and authorization to provide research, education information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, physical or mental disability or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.