

MISSION POSSIBLE:

A Terrifically Successful Daylily Sale

by Adele Keohan, Wakefield, Massachusetts

This mission...should you choose to accept it...

Promote daylilies to the public while selling as many daylilies as you can over a two day period and earn over \$27,000 for your club in the process.

A daunting mission indeed but since I took part in such an event as a volunteer I assure you that it is possible!

A few months before the sale, while flipping through a newly arrived spring issue of the Region 2 newsletter, I read that the Wisconsin Daylily Society has a wildly successful daylily sale each year in August. The sale brings in tens of thousands in dollars and in each successive year they have topped the previous year's earnings. I felt compelled to investigate and see for myself how the WDS members accomplish such an incredible feat. I contacted Rosemary Kleinheinz who chairs the WDS August sale and asked her if I could come and volunteer in order to learn how it's done. She welcomed me to come and I booked my flight the next day.

In terms of membership, the Wisconsin Daylily Society is one of the largest clubs in the AHS. In the September 2016 issue of the WDS newsletter, club president Rhonda Veroeven reported that membership was up to 304. During the two days of preparing the plants and the two days of the sale itself, 80 members volunteered to help. Each year the WDS sale is held in the parking lot of Olbrich Botanical Gardens in Madison, Wisconsin. There is no admission fee to enter and explore the beautiful grounds at Olbrich.

Day One: The mission begins!

I drove in to the large parking lot of Olbrich Botanical Gardens on the first prep day of the WDS sale. I was told to park near the tents. I could not have missed the two tents set up side by side, both 40' x 100'. The red and white tent was reserved for the preparation of daylilies for sale and the white tent would house the



Top to bottom: A fraction of the daylilies to be divided and sold at the WDS sale; strawberry trays waiting to be filled with daylily divisions; WDS member Conrad Wrzesinski and me.

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thousands of daylilies that would be up for sale during the weekend. A much smaller, third tent was erected to shelter the food and the volunteers as they took breaks to eat.

One of the first WDS members to greet me was my new friend, Monique Warnke. Having enjoyed the time I spent with both Monique and Rhonda at the 2016 National Convention in Kentucky, I was very excited to see these ladies again. Rosemary was there as well and with a smile she asked me to follow her. She led me to a storage shed filled with many large bags of daylily clumps. Although the number of daylilies I saw in the shed would have taken me hours upon hours to divide, trim, bag and label, I was told that this was only a small fraction of the number of daylilies that would be prepared for the sale. I was then ushered to the red and white prep tent where I was greeted by someone with whom I had communicated via email and traded daylilies, Conrad Wrzesinski. It was lovely to meet him in person. Rosemary filled me in on what volunteer jobs were available under the prep tent.

Dividing Daylilies

I began my WDS volunteer experience by working with Conrad to divide the clumps he had donated to the sale. There were stacks of strawberry trays both beneath and on top of the tables. I was given a tray in which I found a clipboard, pencil and form to track the number of divisions per donor (photo, top right), clear bags with gussets and holes to allow for air circulation, and colored pieces of paper on which I was to write the cultivar name and number of divisions in each tray (photo, second from top). As I talked and divided plants with Conrad, the familiar scent of fresh earth and day-

lily foliage permeated the air. All day long, people brought large bags of daylily clumps and lined them up along the inside perimeter of the tent near the dividing tables. Where did all these plants come from? The plants came from thirty-nine donors and four WDS display gardens. After helping to divide and bag Conrad's clumps, I worked solo for a while and then decided to take my tray of loosely bagged daylilies to the next step on the journey to the sale tent, the "waiting for labels" table and the "have labels" table. A WDS worker takes a tray of divisions needing labels, notes the number of divisions as written down on the piece of colored paper. Next, a handy laser label printer (above, right) generates the exact number of labels needed. The labels are tucked into one side of the tray and placed on the "have labels" table.



Thru 1979	6	Daylily
'80-'89	8	Sale
90-99	10	Prices
2000-04	16	
2005-07	18	
2008-10	20	
2011 -	26	



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Labeling

Moving to the labeling department, I welcomed the chance to sit down and relax a bit. I watched a few pros who deftly twisted the top of the plastic bag into a coil, wrapped it around the crown of the plant and affixed the label neatly in one fluid motion. After a few tries I found a method that worked for me. I was able to label swiftly enough to feel that I was doing some good at the labeling table and that although my speed with labeling didn't match that of the pros around me, it wasn't so slow as to get kicked off that job. Each full tray of labelled daylily divisions was placed on a rolling cart. When the cart was full, the tray was pushed under the sales tent. After some time at the labeling tables, I picked up my bottle of water and pushed a tray laden cart to the sales tent.

Placement of trays in the sales tent

As trays of cultivars are brought to the sales tent, a WDS member checks the cultivar names against members' wish lists. If a daylily is on a members' wish list, it will be pulled prior to the sale. The WDS member will pay the full sale price for this plant. If the member decides to take a chance and wait until the second day of the sale, the daylily on the wish list and in fact most of the daylilies in the sale will be 50% off! Workers in the sales tent pick up trays with labeled divisions and carry them over to a series of three ring binders, labeled

with letters and arranged alphabetically. Each binder is filled with photos in plastic sheet protectors. All photos are in color and the name of the cultivar is printed in large bold print. In the upper left corner of the paper, the bloom season is indicated. In addition, many of the photos have gold "Award Winner" stickers on them if the daylily has garnered an award, and there are small colorful notes near the photos as well from the WDS members who know and grow the plants. I picked up a tray of robust divisions and read the label: *Hemerocallis* 'Greywood's Roseberry Sorbet' (Wilkinson, D. 2000). I was happy to see how well this daylily from Region 4 hybridizer Darlyn Wilkinson had grown in Wisconsin. I looked through the "G" binder and located the photo of *H. 'Greywood's Roseberry Sorbet'*.

I noticed a small handwritten note on the photo



*Below: On one row of tables are freshly divided daylilies placed loosely in bags. There they wait for labels and secure bagging.
Right: The holes in the plastic bags allow for air circulation to roots.*

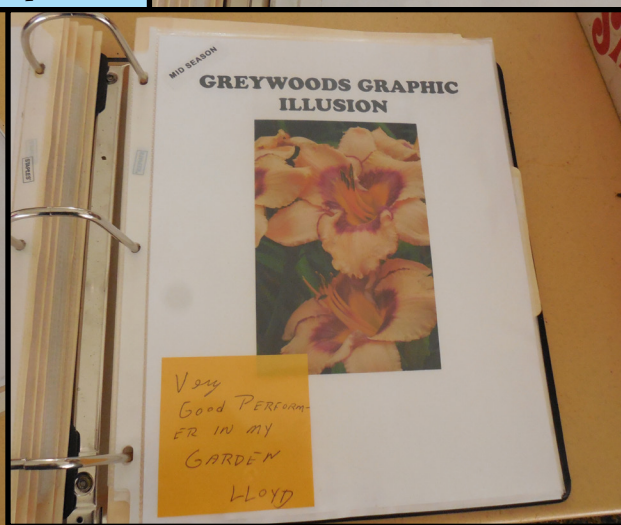


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from a WDS member who wrote "Very good performer in my garden." I removed the photo from the binder and inserted a piece of card stock behind it. Next I grabbed a wooden paint stirrer/stick, placed it between the photo and card stock and ...there you have it, a simple and very efficient sign. The end of the paint stick fits easily into a slot next to the handle on the cardboard strawberry tray. I ask where this tray should be placed and I am told it should be put on the "Rose" table. I quickly locate the

Above, Bagging daylilies with WDS member Dennis Aitken. At right: a strawberry tray filled with daylilies, bagged, labeled and ready to be transferred to the sales tent and placed on the appropriate table. Below, right: two pages from the WDS library of three ring binders filled with daylily cultivars for sale. Below, a chart listing the different sale categories. Trays of daylilies are placed on sales tables by color, form and/or size. One members "wish list" is also visible in this photo. WDS workers in the sales tent keep an eye out for cultivars on members' wish lists, pull the labeled and bagged divisions and place aside. A definite perk of membership!



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In the sales tent, trays of daylily divisions and cultivar photos are placed on the proper tables by color, size or form. Above, a view of the trays, binders and color sign.

tall rose colored sign that says "Rose" and put the tray on it. That was fun! I decided to stay under the sales tent, locate photos and place trays on the proper tables for the next few hours.

Day Two: Working to finish the prep!

This day brought rain, and throughout the day and

into the evening WDS volunteers divided, bagged, labeled, and placed trays onto the now crowded tables in the sales tent. At one point it was so dark in the sales tent that a WDS member drove her car to one end of the tent so that the headlights could give enough illumination for work to continue for a little while longer (photo, above). The red and white prep tent had been dismantled. Before leaving, a few of us lowered and secured the side flaps on the tent to keep out the increasing wind and rain. The sales tent, now standing ready for customers was filled with 6,600 daylily divisions!

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Day Three: The sale opens!

Earlier that morning I went to shop at the famous Wisconsin Farmers Market held in Madison on Saturdays but I kept my eye on my watch and fortunately I made it back to Olbrich Gardens just in time to see the first group of customers enter the sales tent. The weather forecast and the ominous clouds above indicated that there would be heavy rains on this day. Some of the WDS members agreed that the line of customers waiting to buy plants on the first day of the sale had been a good deal longer in previous years. I believe that the threat of a rainstorm [which arrived during the sale with force] kept some customers away, but there were still crowds of people entering and buying daylilies and this was very exciting and encouraging for me to see.

As customers entered, they were handed a strawberry tray and a guide to reading and understanding the abbreviations on the labels. A few savvy shoppers brought their own tote bags, and quickly filled them with daylilies. Some shoppers brought a wish list, checking off the ones they located.



In the sales tent. Left to right: Nancy Deer, Ruth Horrall, Diane Goodman, and Rhonda Veroeven supervise the placement of daylily trays. Left and bottom, the sale opens to customers who flood around the tables to purchase the daylily divisions. Right, each customer is given instructions on how to read the plant labels.



HOW TO READ THE LABELS	
(1) AMERICAN REVOLUTION (2) WILD 1972 (3) 2B (4) M re (5) 5.5 (6) DOR (7) DIP (7) velvety black ridge thr \$5.00	
1. Name of Cultivar	
2. Name of Hybridizer and Year Registered	
3. Length of the Flower Stalk	
4. Season of Bloom	
EE- Extra Early	ML- Mid to Late
E- Early	L- Late
EM- Early to Middle	VL- Very Late
5. Size of the Flower	
6. Type of Foliage	
DOR- Dormant	SEV- Semi-Evergreen EV- Evergreen
7. Description: (May include some of the following)	
dbl- double flower	ez- eye Zone
self- only color	blend- Blend of 2 colors
ext- extended bloom	mr- midribs
frag- fragrant	thr- throat
noc- nocturnal	re- rebloom
w- with	vfr- very fragrant
wm- watermark	sp- spider form
bicolor- petals one color; sepals another color	
polychrome- Mix of many colors	
dip- diploid	tet- tetraploid



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Day Four: 50% off, the sale concludes, and volunteers get free daylilies!

On the second day of the sale, a wave of customers flooded into the tent to take advantage of the fact that everything, save some select daylilies from Wisconsin hybridizers would be 50% off. What a bargain! I noticed that my friend Monique was taking credit card transactions. Monique showed me how to handle this type of transaction using a square credit card reader. WDS member Deb Kleppe helped me take a few credit card purchases as Monique was called away. Deb showed me the postcards that customers are asked to fill out as they make their purchases. The customer writes his/her name and address, and the postcard will be sent out in advance of next year's sale as a reminder to return. I think that this is very clever way to stay in touch with

everyone who bought daylilies at the sale. On each check out table, colorful forms entice customers to take and read about the Wisconsin Daylily Society, a membership application and information on daylily culture. As the day went on, WDS volunteers helped customers and kept an eye out for empty strawberry trays. Empty trays were returned to the tent entrance for use by

Above, a steady flow of customers purchasing daylilies. Below, two trays of Hemerocallis 'Greywoods Roseberry Sorbet' (Wilkinson, D. 2000) divisions are ready to be purchased. Below, left: Rhonda Veroeven and I post live videos of the sale to Facebook.



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customers or to be brushed off, flattened and bagged in piles to be stored and used next year. The photos were returned to the three ring binders, card stock and paint sticks returned to their respective containers.

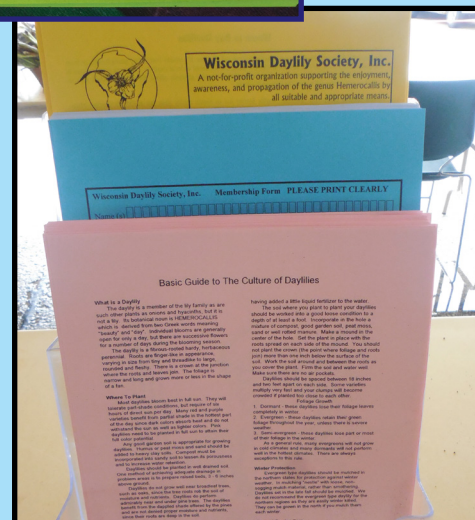
By the time the daylily sale was over, only a fraction of the 800 cultivars / 6,600 daylily divisions remained. A few individuals collecting daylilies for local non-profit charities such as Habitat for Humanity, Gilda's Club, the City of Madison, Rotary Gardens, Village of Shorewood, and Allen Centennial Garden were ushered around to take daylilies for their charities. After they had taken all they could carry, a WDS member took some daylilies to be planted around the police stations in the area. Monique had also been walking around, pulling the newer daylily introductions; these would be grown out and sold at the 2019 National Convention. Another group of plants were taken to grow out and use for next year's sale. The final WDS sale total was announced at over \$27, 000! Rosemary invited volunteers to take any of the left over plants they wanted for free. WDS members filled bags full of daylilies. I filled two paper grocery bags full and had to ship them to my home as I didn't want to take them on the plane with me.

WDS volunteers were treated to scrumptious meals each day [I certainly did not go hungry during my visit] and they were allowed first dibs on all the daylilies that came in to the sales tent. WDS members earn

"WDS dollars" for each hour they volunteer at a WDS meeting, event or sale. These WDS dollars can be used toward daylily sale purchases. A lot of volunteering means a lot of WDS dollars to spend. Any member who volunteers at the sale get a certificate worth \$10 off their meal at the WDS Annual Meeting.

From the start and throughout the four days of my WDS volunteer experience it was apparent to me that the success of the WDS sale each year is due to a combination of meticulous organization, teamwork and member participation. Publicity for this event is thorough. In January, WDS publicity chair June Johnson begins by asking every garden institution in Southeast Wisconsin to post a WDS sale flyer in their newsletters. In February, WDS mans a booth at a large Garden Expo event where new membership is cultivated. June advertises the sale in the Wisconsin Gardener magazine, the Wisconsin State Journal (4X) and 20 regional weekly newspapers. Advertisement for the sale is also accomplished via the Wisconsin Public Radio station; on 'The Larry Meiller Show - "Garden Talk" program' WDS representatives advertise the sale, give information on

Below, left to right: Deb Kleppe and Monique Warnke are at the ready to handle the credit card transactions. Below, the WDS sends a sale reminder postcard to each customer in advance of next year's sale.



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daylilies and answer listeners' questions. The reminder postcards which customers fill out as they complete their purchases serve as another method by which word of the sale can be spread. I really like that idea.

If my schedule allows, I fully intend to return next year and volunteer again. It was thrilling to be a part of such a successful endeavor, and it was a wonderful opportunity to forge new friendships. I eagerly anticipate the 2019 AHS National Convention as the host club will be the Wisconsin Daylily Society. The Wisconsin Daylily Sale has been tweaked and improved over a number of years. At the end of this sale Monique looked for input and feedback from WDS members. What went well? What—if anything-- should be changed? Not a thing, in my humble opinion.

A successful daylily sale may seem a difficult mission to undertake, but regardless of the size of your local daylily club, with good publicity, teamwork and organization, this mission is possible. I hope that some of the practices and ideas described in this article will be helpful when planning your club's next daylily sale.

Links to Live Videos of the WDS Sale:

<https://www.facebook.com/adele.keohan/videos/969452946517251/>

<https://www.facebook.com/adele.keohan/videos/969434316519114/>



Above, Daylily blooms on display invite closer inspection by customers. Right, top to bottom: As strawberry trays of daylilies empty during the sale, the trays and daylily photos are stored for use next year; Rick Leccese wipes off the strawberry trays and readies them for next year's sale; After the sale concluded on Sunday, WDS volunteers were invited to take any remaining daylilies for free!