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Agapanthus: So Much to Love!
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When the subject of donations of garden perennials for an upcoming propagation class came up at a recent Master Gardener Meeting, I could hear shouted, “you can come dig up my agapanthus!” followed by laughter.

Are agapanthus not getting enough love? Why ever not? Truth be told, we didn’t always appreciate agapanthus, sometime called “African Blue Lily” or “Lily-of-the-Nile.” Agapanthus is a fairly common, been-around-a-long time sort of plant. Gardeners are often on the lookout for new shapes, colors, ...that trendy something every garden doesn’t already have. On the other hand, agapanthus are easy to grow and yes, quickly multiply.

When we moved into our house in 2014, the garden had been in place for 20 years. The new-to-us landscape needed work and the spouse and I enjoy puttering outdoors and spied what looked to us like several large clumps of daylilies. Oh joy! I thought we’d hoist them up, divide them and score a bunch of free plants to fill in bare spots.

Bummer, we learned we did not have daylilies but a plant we’d long been indifferent to – agapanthus. According to the Sunset Western Garden Book, agapanthus should be divided infrequently. Master Gardeners know it is a truth universally acknowledged, that agapanthus are hard to dig up and divide. Fortunately, these plants are sturdy so we needn’t be dainty with getting an overgrown clump up and divided using back-to-back garden forks and at some point, a saw. Depending on the size of the clumps that are replanted, blossoms can appear the next season or more likely, in two- three years. Of course, I didn’t know this, so instead of the recommended two-four divisions per mass, I had ours chopped into eight or more separate plants. I was feeling the need for many plants and “free” is the most powerful word in the English language. Our plants began reblooming immediately here in Sunset Zone 9.

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We are pleased with the increasing masses of long-stemmed blue-clustered blossoms burst forth with very little effort. There are the weeks in spring when days get warmer and everything is waking up and growing? On agapanthus, we see the flower stalks gradually emerge, strong and sturdy with no staking required. The flower bud heads grow fatter, along with anticipation by humans and maybe critters alike.

At this point, I should mention that agapanthus are not particularly deer-resistant. Last year, I saw our neighbors' front yard agapanthus in bloom for the entire season. The year before, they were devoured just before the blossoms opened. The upside, because gardeners are optimists, is the foliage is generally left untouched and as an evergreen in our climate, we will always have that bit of tidy greenery to admire. For ideas for unfenced garden spaces in El Dorado County, visit mgeldorado.ucanr.edu and enter "deer resistant plants" in the search field.

As for what agapanthus need to thrive in a garden setting, the research says "not much." Full sun, light shade, or partial shade are all possible for bloom. Of course plants prefer average-to-good, well-drained soil, but these will grow in most any soil. Regular watering is nice, but isn't necessary after established. We have hundreds of agapanthus growing below oak trees with no irrigation in garden soil that is best described as rocky.

We are converts. Agapanthus deserve a lot of garden love.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. Visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College – El Dorado Center. The garden is open on the second Saturday of each month, 9:00 a.m. to noon, till April 2019.

For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.