

Day Lilies

Trevor West Knapp

My neighbor, whose garden is a masterwork
of form and color, can't understand
why I plant so many day lilies. "I want
what will bloom all summer." "Yes,"
I say, "I see your point." I know
it would make more sense
to search out what promises
the mad riot of color I crave,
winter-worn and eager as I am each year
to witness the perpetual
rite of defiance. It should be
only sturdy perennials I choose, hale
and prolific, gaillardia, stokesia, coreopsis,
shooting their bright arrows of content
summer to frost. How to explain
a theory of gardening so little dependent
on longevity, though that
has its place here too. I choose
plants I admire for how
they go about their business: The poppies,
never having heard what kids are told, tilt back
their sassy heads to the sun, pivot
on frail stalks to follow it
through the hot afternoon. Or,
the rambunctious tumble
of clematis, its fragile new growth
looking for purchase, to gain strength
from a tight embrace. And the day lilies,

each plant sending up one stalk,
the small cluster of buds that begins
the long ripening, weeks of preparation
for just one day
of blossom, each bud, cracking its tight seal
the day before it blooms, the petals
just parting, like the hesitant
mouth of a child turned up to question
this sharp awakening into breath-catching
brilliance, reminding me
there is no other beauty that can thrill
like an only chance.