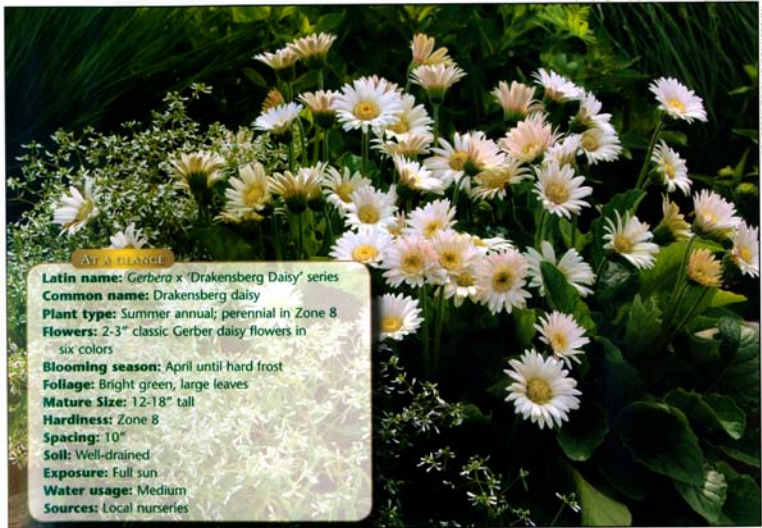


Gerbera

'Drakensberg Daisy'

This new hybrid is nothing like the Gerberas you've tried before!

Jimmy Turner



ART & PLANT

Latin name: *Gerbera* x 'Drakensberg Daisy' series

Common name: Drakensberg daisy

Plant type: Summer annual; perennial in Zone 8

Flowers: 2-3" classic Gerber daisy flowers in six colors

Blooming season: April until hard frost

Foliage: Bright green, large leaves

Mature Size: 12-18" tall

Hardiness: Zone 8

Spacing: 10"

Soil: Well-drained

Exposure: Full sun

Water usage: Medium

Sources: Local nurseries

Every so often a plant comes along that takes me completely by surprise, and 'Drakensberg Daisy' Gerbera really astonished me. A few years back, I heard a "horticultural legend" that there was a plant breeder working on Gerber daisies that would not only take the full sun and heat of Texas but would also be perennial in Zone 8! Gerber daisy? Really? The same daisy that you see in small pots at your local florist and grocery store? I have tried growing those outside, and the moment the temperature rose, they died.

When I was offered a tray of 'Drakensberg Daisy' to try, I was skeptical to say the least. I figured one good 100-degree day in full sun in our sticky black clay and they would shrivel up and die. I was wrong! This plant put out more flowers the hotter and steamier it got, plus our alkaline soil didn't bother it at all. I was certain that a good torrential rain and hot steamy day would cover it in powdery mildew. Once again I was wrong! 'Drakensberg Daisy' didn't get a case of fungus all summer.

Profuse white blooms with ivory centers cover this planting of 'Drakensberg Daisy' White.

Throughout the summer until fall, 18-inch flower stems shot up from the dark green mounded foliage, bearing 2-inch slightly cupped daisies. I thought that surely if they liked the heat so much, the first cool fall weather would cause them to collapse and die. Nope, they just responded to the lowering temperatures with even more flowers. Surely a light frost would stop the flowers – not so! This plant kept on flowering even after a few nights of 30 degrees. It finally took a 28-degree night to burn the foliage and stop the



Gerbera 'Drakensberg Daisy' Orange is one of six colors currently available.

flowers. I have found that the plants are hardier in the ground than in containers. Expect them to be perennial in Zone 8; farther north, protect them during winter by moving them to your garage or covering during severe weather.

The first year, our Dallas Arboretum staff liked this plant so much that I didn't care if it was touted to be perennial; the plants were scheduled to come into the greenhouse for the winter and then go back out. This winter I'm here to testify that these daisies withstood night temperatures in the low teens, and two weeks later, they were showing new growth shooting up. 'Drakensberg Daisy' was so surprising to me that I even called around to ask fellow trial gardens across the state how it was doing for them. Come to find out, it performed just as well in sandy and acidic soils as it did in my sticky clay.

'Drakensberg Daisy' shattered my image of the frail, greenhouse-grown, tender florist crop. This plant is a whole new flower. I had to go back and do some more research to see what made this plant so tough. I found out the original breeder took the common and beautiful *Gerbera jamesonii* and bred it back to a tough little alpine species from the Drakensberg Mountains in the eastern part of Southern Africa. This combination resulted in a new Gerber daisy with exceptional vigor.

Even if 'Drakensberg Daisy' weren't a fairly tough perennial, I'd still use it gen-

erously as a summer annual. This flower currently comes in six colors: Buttermilk – a very soft pale yellow flower with darker center; Carmine – dark carmine-pink with lighter center; Orange – a soft buff orange; Pink – a pale soft pink; Scarlet – bright scarlet red; and White – a pure white with an ivory center. The prolific flowers on long stems are perfect for cutting, lasting for weeks in water. I have used this daisy in mixed containers, planted *en masse* as part of a formal annual display, and mixed into a perennial border. I haven't been disappointed yet.

I hope that 'Drakensberg Daisy' will surprise you as much as it has me. Just remember this is a different plant than the florist *Gerbera*. The plant size is markedly bigger, and the flowers are smaller but produced in masses. Most importantly, it can survive the toughest weather that a Texas summer can throw at it and keep on flowering. This is a relatively new plant, so it may be a little hard to find initially, but keep on looking because it's well worth the search. If your local nurseries don't stock it, ask them to order it for you. ★

About the author: Jimmy Turner is senior director of gardens at the Dallas Arboretum and a contributing editor to this publication. Visit www.dallasplanttrials.org for more information on his trials.

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