

LYING IN WAIT

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Many years ago, a friend challenged me to name an adjective, as opposed to an adverb, ending in LY. I do not recall if I succeeded, but the problem remained in my subconscious, and has surfaced at irregular intervals ever since. Occasionally I would sit down and mentally compose a list of ten or fifteen such words, each time trying to surpass my last effort.

The most recent time this notion emerged, it became obsessive. I found myself compiling lists as I drove, as I swam, during business meetings, during meals; and sometimes when I woke my mind would play back the list I had composed while asleep. I passed the 50 mark the first hour, the 100 mark the first day, and the 200 mark within the week.

Now that the birthing is over, I present the results for your delectation, neatly parcelled by meaning or type of construct. The first class of LY adjectives I found dealt with personal appearance:

burly	homely	roly-poly	ugly
comely	lovely	sightly	
gangly	portly	stately	

It is well to mention that I have avoided including the negated forms, such as UNSIGHTLY, except in the case of UNRULY, where the positive form is obscure. Also, where a word seemed to fit several categories, I made an arbitrary choice.

The immediate extension of appearance was to other types of characterizations of people. Such words are:

elderly	kindly	sickly	weakly
friendly	lively	silly	wily
gainly	lonely	slovenly	woolly
godly	lowly	sprightly	worldly
holy	mannerly	surly	
jolly	poorly	unruly	

Many characterizations are of the form xxxly, where xxx is some category of person forming a role-model for the behavior described. The construct means 'in the manner of xxx':

bastardly	gentlemanly	miserly	slatternly
beggarly	grandfatherly	motherly	slovenly
brotherly	grandmotherly	niggardly	soldierly
cowardly	kingly	priestly	statesmanly
curmudgeonly	lordly	princely	wifely
dastardly	maidenly	queenly	wizardly
daughterly	manly	scholarly	womanly
fatherly	matronly	sisterly	workmanly

To these, we may add a few words derived from nonhuman characterizations:

beastly	courtly	earthly	ghostly
churchly	deathly	ghastly	heavenly

Two rich sources of LY adjectives are time and direction. From the basic stock of:

hourly	nightly	monthly	yearly
daily	weekly	quarterly	

we may apply a variety of modifiers to obtain:

biweekly	semiweekly	twice-daily	half-yearly
bimonthly	semiyearly	twice-weekly	thrice-weekly

and all their permutations. In directions, we have the primary:

easterly	westerly	northerly	southerly
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to which other points of the compass may be added:

southeasterly	south-southwesterly	north-by-north-northwesterly
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These are complemented by an equally-large set in which ERLY is replaced by WARDLY.

By far the most abundant source of LY adjectives is nouns and verbs ending in the sound L, whether spelled L, EL, LE, LL or otherwise:

bubbly	fiddly	jowly	scraggly
bustly	frilly	mealy	scrawly
chilly	giggly	nubbly	scowly
crackly	gnarly	oily	smelly
crawly	gravelly	pearly	smily
crumbly	gristly	prickly	sniffly
crumply	grizzly	rattly	snively
cuddly	growly	ravelly	snuffly
curly	grumbly	rilly	snuggly
drawly	hilly	ruffly	sparkly
dribbly	howly	rustly	spindly
drooly	jiggly	scaly	squally

squeally	swirly	topply	wiggly
steely	tickly	twinkly	wobbly
straggly	tipply	whirly	wriggly

There is a small residue of words that did not fit easily into any of the chosen categories:

bally	deadly	grisly	only
bully	early	likely	timely
costly	goodly	lily	

How many LY adjectives are there? Can we ever know? Yes, we can! The number is infinite, or, as mathematicians say, unbounded. This is shown by exhibiting two families of LY adjectives, each having an unlimited number of members. The first family was seen before, namely DAILY, TWICE-DAILY, THRICE-DAILY, FOUR-TIMES-DAILY, and so forth. The other, **which** is somewhat more satisfying, is ONE-PLY, TWO-PLY, THREE-PLY, FOUR-PLY, ad infinitum.

Having now shown an indefinitely long list of LY adjectives, I can now rest, assured that no reader can ever top me by finding a longer one.

THE 4-STAR PUZZLER

This is the name of a new monthly magazine of 12 pages, started in January 1981 by the editors of Games magazine, designed to be "the most challenging popular puzzle publication in the United States". Word Ways readers will be interested to hear that nearly all of the magazine is devoted to word puzzles. Some of these are well-known (standard and cryptic crosswords, cryptograms, acrostics) but others are less commonly encountered (a variant of the diagramless puzzle known as "battleships", a petal-shaped crossword, picture rebuses of the style popular in the 1930s, and Enigma-type rhymed puzzles originally published between 1822 and 1942). Non-puzzle material includes book reviews (one on Word Recreations, an anthology of Word Ways articles) and biographies (Eugene Maleska, N.Y. Times crossword puzzle editor). A one-year subscription (PO Box 10149, Des Moines IA 50349) is available for \$9.97 (Canadian or foreign, add \$2).