

## Lilies and Lilies

From Biblical times onward, the very name 'lily' has burrowed into our brain cells with the promise of beauty. As children we fell in love with lily of the valley, tiny white bells on a stem with a fragrance as exquisite as those bells. That spring bloomer is not a lily but *Convallaria* and what is occasionally called the lily-of-the-valley bush is *Pieris japonica*: the lily-of-the-valley tree is a large shrub, the *Clethra arborea*.

Another curious plant, *Tricyrtis*, the toad lily, is actually a member of the lily family, *Liliaceae*, not the toad family. The foliage has charm, shiny light green leaves clasping the stem. The flowers are odd and attractive if the rabbits don't eat them before their late summer blooming. Almost funnel shaped, they open like a star in the leaf axils with spotted sepals.

Also a fauna flora is the Trout lily, *Erythronium*. Called dog's tooth violet, perhaps because the bulb is pointed and tooth-like, it is a native. Nearly ten years ago I had two blooms in April: this year I had two blooms in April. They are said to naturalize? The foliage has two semi-erect basal leaves, mottled slightly in brown and the small yellow lily has recurved petals. I might have more than the two if I'd move them from under the beech tree.

Equally shy is the rain lily, *Zephyranthes*. This is a good lily to plant because it belongs, not to the lily family, but to the *Amaryllidaceae*, the clan of the daffodil, therefore the bulb will not be eaten by voles or other marauders. These pretty things, six-petaled stars in pink, white, red, or yellow, do indeed follow the rain.

Then there is the grande dame, the Calla lily. This lovely thing has 'presence' – like a Noel Coward heroine. It belongs with other smooth leaved plants or ferns or hostas that tolerate sun. It is not a lily, but *Zantedeschia*, a member of the *Araceae* family and a cousin to Arums. The single stately spathe rises from broadly heart-shaped leaves. In zone 7 they are usually grown in pots unless in a sheltered spot. Some species have handsomely spotted leaves and the spathes, which open narrowly like a chalice, can be white or gold, yellow, pink or red.

Lovely true lilies are the mainstay of our summer gardens. There are about 100 species and since they seem to interbreed freely there are probably more with each passing year. More and more gardeners are growing lilies in large pots rather than putting them in smaller pots and burying the pot as a protection against their becoming dessert for critters. The flowers can be funnel, trumpet, or bowl-shaped or, as in the Turk's cap lily, have recurved petals. To make their various and specific cultural requirements less difficult, they are divided into nine divisions: I – Asiatic hybrids; II - Martagon hybrids; III- Candidum hybrids; IV –American hybrids; V- Longiflorum hybrids; VI- Trumpet & Aurelian hybrids; VII –Oriental hybrids; VIII – Other hybrids; and IX – All true species.

Not only are the blooms small, medium, and large, but the blooms occur from spring through autumn, early, midseason and late. Although some lack fragrance, many are wonderfully fragrant, such as 'Casa Blanca' (Div. VII).

Lily bulbs do not have a dormant season so if you do order them, plan your schedule so that you can plant them as soon as they arrive in autumn. Plant them at a depth two to three times their height and with a distance between the bulbs equal to three times their diameter. You will notice if you have them in a pot that after a few years they do not flower, merely produce foliage indicating it is time to divide and repot them.

Lilies grow best in well-drained soil enriched with leaf mold or well-rotted organic matter. Most lilies prefer acidic to neutral soil but some like a neutral to alkaline soil. They appreciate having the base of the plant in shade and some do well in a light woodland setting. The familiar white, fall blooming Madonna lily, *L. candidum*, can be planted only one inch deep in moderately dry soil, preferably alkaline, so you may use lime in preparing the hole. This is the only lily that produces overwintering basal leaves.