



UNIVERSITY OF
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IFAS EXTENSION

Friday's Feature

By

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Red spider lilies magically appear in late summer

Each September something almost magical happens in our Gulf Coast gardens. The heavy summer rains prompt the forgotten red spider lilies to pop up and surprise everyone.

This amaryllis relative has many common names, including hurricane lily and schoolhouse lily-- so named because they bloom in hurricane season and, believe it or not, were used to start school in September. Other common names include surprise lily, magic lily, resurrection lily and naked lady.

Known botanically as *Lycoris* species, you might think these bulbs are native to the South because of the way they naturalize with ease and bring color and beauty to the overheated landscape. But these fascinating, easy-to-grow bulbs actually originated in East Asia.

More than twenty *Lycoris* species are known, and there are countless hybrids, but most are not widely grown. The *Lycoris* species that grow best in Florida develop long, narrow leaves that emerge in fall, persist through winter, and die down in spring. The clumps of blue-green foliage resemble monkey grass but with a pale stripe down the center of each leaf. Leaves turn yellow in spring and should be allowed to die naturally. And because no leaves are present during the summer months we tend to forget about these bulbs during their dormant season.

In late summer after heavy rains, spectacular flowers appear almost magically since there are no leaves to indicate where the bulb is planted. Leafless stems emerge and quickly grow up to two feet tall before being topped by five to seven tubular flowers in large clusters. Flowers have narrow, strap-like petals and extremely long stamens, giving a spidery appearance to the flowers--hence the common name, spider lily.

Spider lilies are very easy to grow in Florida. Dormant bulbs are best planted during late summer and fall. Bulbs should be planted so the "neck" is just below the soil surface. When planting, choose a site that will protect the fragile flowers from too much wind and sun. Place the bulbs three to four inches deep, spacing them six to eight inches apart. They can be planted in straight lines for a formal look, but usually look better in bold, informal drifts.

Spider lilies thrive in sunny to partially-sunny locations. Because flower clusters only last about two weeks, these bulbs make a great addition to beds with a groundcover like ivy where the flowers will emerge above the groundcover but will not be missed when they retreat back to the ground.

The most common spider lily is *Lycoris radiata* var. *radiata* which produces red-orange flowers. This plant is very fast growing and quickly forms large clumps of bulbs that can be separated and planted. This particular spider lily has been cultivated since the early 1800's in the U.S. and is considered an "heirloom plant" in the South.



Lycoris aurea (golden spider lily) produces clusters of golden yellow, trumpet-shaped flowers. Sturdy, bluish leaves emerge in fall and grow up to 24 inches long, producing a larger plant than red spider lily.

A note of caution, bulbs of all *Lycoris* species are poisonous. Although they are considered to have low toxicity, homeowners should be aware of the poisonous potential, particularly to small children and pets.



Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>