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News Release

“NAKED LADY” LILIES BLOOM WITHOUT LEAVES

Question: We moved into a new home last year and noticed an unusual flower springing up. These new plants have lovely red flowers, but no foliage. Do you know what these lovely flowers are called and how to take care of them?

Answer: This is likely one of the *Lycoris* species that go by a number of common names such as naked lady, spider lily, surprise lily, magic lily, resurrection lily, and hurricane lily. These lilies are members of the Amaryllis Family, which includes other well-known bulbs such as common amaryllis, daylilies, daffodils, rain lilies and snowdrops.

These lilies are easy to grow and naturalize readily. If you plant new ones or move to a new location, the bulbs should be planted so the "neck" is just below the soil surface. Dormant bulbs are best planted during late summer and fall, whereas actively growing plants can be planted other times of the year.

These lilies thrive in sunny to partially sunny areas, such as the edges of woodlands and shrub borders or under deciduous trees. They do not require fertilizer or irrigation, but grow best in loose, moist soil with good organic matter.

The types of these lilies that grow best here will have long, narrow leaves that emerge in fall, persist through winter, and die down in spring. The clumps of blue-green foliage resemble liriopse (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. Cutting back leaves while they are yellowing will harm the bulb and reduce flowering. No leaves are present during summer months when bulbs are dormant or when the blooms arise (hence the name Naked Lady).

These lilies are called surprise or magic lily because in late summer after a heavy rain flowers appear almost magically since there is no foliage to indicate where the bulb is planted. Leafless stems emerge and quickly grow 12 to 24 or more inches tall before being topped by 8-inch clusters of tubular flowers. Most species have flowers with narrow, strap-like petals and extremely long stamens, giving a spidery appearance to the flowers (and hence another common name, spider lily). These lilies make excellent cut flowers as well as beautiful garden plants.

They have a reputation for inconsistent flowering from year to year. This is often caused by bulb crowding. Large clumps of bulbs should be divided every few years to avoid crowding which results in reduced growth and reduced flowering. Bulb clumps are best divided from now through early summer when bulbs are dormant. Flowering may be delayed a year or more due to the shock of dividing.

Lycoris species have long been used as garden flowers in their native habitats of China and Japan. Bulbs of all *Lycoris* species contain the alkaloid poison, lycorine. Although *Lycoris* bulbs are considered to have low toxicity, homeowners should be aware of the poisonous potential, particularly if small children and pets are present. On the other hand, this poisonous component has the benefit of making these plants resistant to damage from deer and rodents. Another alkaloid component they contain is galantamine, which is used in medications to treat Alzheimers-type dementia. *Lycoris* is being grown in plantations in China for mass harvest to extract this compound.

As I mentioned earlier the Amaryllis family contains many plants including the daylily family.

For more about this topic please contact Tony Glover, Regional Extension Agent-Home Horticulture, Home Gardens and Home Pest Management at the St. Clair County Extension Office at (205) 338-9416 or email gloveta@auburn.edu.

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