

# Flowering Batteries

*Summer Blooming Bulbs*



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FLOWERING BATTERIES: SUMMER BLOOMING BULBS

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Written by G. Edwin Varner.

# Preface

This informative and entertaining ebook explores several summer-blooming bulbs, tubers, rhizomes, or corms that will enhance your summer gardening pleasure. Some of these plants, like dahlias, gladiolus, and lilies, are popular garden inhabitants. In contrast, many others are relatively obscure or unrealized. We should become more aware of and enjoy these highly colorful and sometimes fragrant flowers. This publication describes several rare types to consider for your summer-to-fall blooming garden.

Not many garden centers offer these unacquainted bulbs. Still, you should investigate some outstanding bulb specialty business catalogs and websites that will likely offer them for sale.

The following plants offer generous blooming and vivid floral colors and scents. Unfortunately, many are not exceptionally hardy but will do well as outstanding container plantings. No matter where you plant the following bulbs, they will provide you with plenty of beautiful summer-to-fall flowers.

The digital photos feature flowers from my home, public gardens, and various nurseries in my area. Additionally, there are Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images.

# Introduction

We are all aware of the beauty and popularity of spring-blooming bulbs such as tulips and daffodils planted in the fall. What is not as immediately recognizable or popularly known are the equally gorgeous summer-blooming bulbs, tubers, rhizomes, and corms.

For simplicity's sake, let's consider them all as "bulbs." These plants have different energy storage structures that light up this year's beautiful flower displays by absorbing the previous summer's sunlight. They are, in essence, living solar light rechargeable batteries! They are also considered perennials—able to multiply, grow, and bloom each year. Unfortunately, many are not exceptionally hardy but will do well as outstanding container plantings and require indoor winter storage.

Before identifying these beautiful summer-blooming plants, we need to clarify what type of "rechargeable batteries" they are.

Each plant forms specific structures that accumulate starches or carbohydrates produced from its leaves' photosynthetic activity during the growing season. True bulbs are globular or rounded, like an onion or tulip, where layers of modified leaves store the accumulated sugars, minerals, and proteins. These overlapping leaves enclose the future-developing flower buds, functional leaves, and stems. Bulbs are firm but semi-malleable, so they must be handled gently. Immediately recognizable bulbs include onions, tulips, daffodils, lilies, and others.

Corms are closely related to bulbs but are not swollen leaves; they are modified stems that store the accumulated energy and nutrients from the following year. Corms are more "solidified" or firmer than bulbs. They resemble them but are usually much smaller, with tightly overlapping membranous scaly leaves. Larger corms produce several small ones during the growing season, called cormlets. Gladiolus and crocus are popular examples that form corms.

Tubers use the energy storage solution to a more recognizable level, using the old standby method, the plant's root system. Parts of the root

systems enlarge, storing the accumulated carbohydrates and other nutrients. They swell slowly underground over the growing season and remain dormant until the following growing season's warmed soil.

There are two types of tubers: root and stem. Root tubers are swollen or enlarged modified roots that absorb water, minerals, proteins, and large amounts of carbohydrates. Examples of these are dahlias and sweet potatoes. Stem tubers are, well...enlarged stems located near the soil surface. These tubers form small, underdeveloped growth buds or "eyes." Examples of this type of tuber are potatoes, tuberous begonias, caladiums, and ranunculus.

Finally, there are the rhizome-making plants. Rhizomes are enlarged horizontally growing energy-storage stems having fully functional but pre-developmental new plant sections. Some enlarged rhizomes are "above-ground" types, like the German Bearded Iris. Many other plants develop "below-ground" rhizomes, which are constantly underground to avoid potentially harsh freezing conditions. Examples of these are peonies, calla lilies, and cannas.

Confused? Mother Nature can undoubtedly create complexities involving all these "non-true-bulb" storage structures.

Ultimately, for all gardeners, the only labor needed is to select, purchase, and later plant these plants in the late spring or, if they are cold-hardy, in the fall. Most must be inserted several inches beneath the soil surface to prevent them from freezing during the winter. The ground will need adequate tilling with added humus and high-phosphorus fertilizer (or bone meal). Once tucked into the ground, usually in the late spring, we must wait a few weeks to enjoy the colorful flowers.

Inserting the bulbs in the ground creates different trains of thought. Many gardeners advise planting similar bulbs in groups. They look better when blooming than single plantings, which look rather lonely. Some gardeners like geometrical plantings, while others prefer the "fling to the ground" method and insert the bulbs where they fall. This

is the “natural-looking” idea since Mama Nature dislikes a prim-and-proper and neat-and-tidy concept.

Don’t take this casual idea too far. When planting different bulbs, don’t intermix them if they all bloom simultaneously. This Hodge-Podge of mixed species of bulbs will look embarrassing and amateurish — you want to look like a professional gardener.

All garden centers and nurseries offer many types and varieties of colors each fall. Still, they may not be the best options. Purchase the following plants from online bulb specialty nurseries for the healthiest and most colorful types.

So, what can you plant in your spectacular summertime garden? Let’s begin with...

# **Agapanthus — Lily Of The Nile; African Lily**

## ***Agapanthus* species and mixed-up hybrid varieties**



Grown not by bulbs but from swollen rhizomes, this South African native is winter hardy only in zones 8 to 11. For colder climate gardeners, we must carefully dig up those rhizomes by fall and store them in a dark, ever-so-moist medium until replanting in late spring, when the ground is toasty warm. They dislike bone-dry or too-moist storage soil.

This plant also hates cold conditions, and that is not only its temperamental behavior. It demands plenty of sunlight for several

hours daily, well-drained but highly fertile, composted soil, and plenty of well-timed, periodic watering throughout the growing season. Even if you provide all these five-star hotel concierge service amenities, *Agapanthus* may not bloom for you. Then again, it may last for a while and then suddenly stop. Good lord. Why bother planting this botanical prima donna?

When the conditions merit, *Agapanthus* blooms with gorgeous umbel clusters of tubular or bell-shaped flowers atop stems towering above rosettes of long, strap-like leaves. The petals are primarily in shades of blue or purple, but white varieties can also be found in specialty nurseries. Although labeled as a “lily,” it is not in that family but in the Hippeastrum or Amaryllis family.

Even if you experience prolific blooming, the weight of those blossoms will topple over the stems to the ground. Because of this potential hazard, you need to space the rhizomes closer when planting, making each stem eventually support the other. Unfortunately, this plant hates to be crowded. Go figure!

If you are unsure about tucking this perplexing princess plant in a flower bed, you can plop it into a container. Some growers report that confined habitat makes the plants respond with more reliable blooming during the summer. The recommended plan is one plant per foot diameter of pot size. Larger containers can support more plants (or rhizomes). That spacing limit should keep this temperamental beast “somewhat” controlled for more reliability of blooming.

Container planting also prevents digging up the rhizomes in the fall and allows for better storage during the winter. Let’s leave this spoiled plant alone and concentrate on more manageable and colorful bulbous plants for your summer enjoyment.

# Alstroemeria — Peruvian Lily

## *Alstroemeria* species and hybrids



*Alstroemeria* spreads by underground swollen roots or rhizomes. However, they can be brittle when established, so avoid transplanting them. Possibly for this reason, these plants are rarely offered for sale except in larger garden centers or online nurseries. Still, they can grow in pots or larger containers. They make long-lasting cut flowers (that's why florists love them) and bloom for several weeks in early summer.

This tender perennial is not a true lily, but the exotic-looking blossoms resemble one. You may not recognize these plants unless you visit your local florist. You will see their appearance before growing them in your garden. They have bright colors of yellow, orange, white, pink, or red with a contrasting yellow throat splashed with purple-brown streaks or

spots (called nectar guides) on each petal. Some species have stunningly beautiful pale lavender-purple petals.

Breeders are trying to establish better winter hardiness since these plants are native to tropical locations in South America. Although the proposed northern survival limit is zone 7, gardeners will still need to plant it deeper in sandy soil and at a southern exposure.

They grow exceptionally well in full sun to partial shade in well-drained, sandy soil with plenty of added organic compost. Mulch well to protect the roots from the extremes of summer and winter temperatures. Their total height is approximately 30 inches. You can also plant them in large containers. I highly recommend this method for colder-climate gardeners to overwinter in the home.

# Begonia

## Begonia tuberosa



Mother Nature appears to have a few favorite flowers. She has outdone herself in creating certain plants. Begonias are an example of her endearment, as she has over 1,300 species. Most of these species are tropical or semi-tropical but grow well in partly shaded flower beds or containers.

Most begonias have thick, fleshy stems – an adaptation to store water when the soil becomes too dry. They grow best in well-drained soil that periodically dries. The stems and tubers will rot if subjected to soggy soil. Some begonias develop tubers or thickened rhizomes (stems) that act as energy storage structures to survive during the dry seasons in the tropics, but will die if subjected to freezing conditions.

No matter the type of growth, size, or shape, their main popularity lies in their showy and colorful leaves and flowers. The flowers can be simple, single-petaled blossoms or flamboyant, billowy, large-petaled ones. The leaves can be dark green to bronze with random contrasting patterns.

Tuberous Begonias (*Begonia tuberosa* or *tuberosa hybrida*) – shown above – are popular annuals usually grown for displays in a hanging basket and containers. They are tender plants treated as annuals, even though you can save the tough, fibrous, concave-shaped tubers over the winter. That’s the theory, but the tubers may dry and die by spring. I recommend purchasing new plants each spring from any nursery or garden center.

Some popular tuberous begonias produce colorful and flamboyant “fluffy” flowers that resemble roses. These are the male blossoms, while the female flowers are less excessive in the number of petals. Sensitive to wet soil, the tubers and stems can rot if not grown in well-drained, porous soils. They can adapt to full sunlight, but the harsh heat can damage the blossoms and leaves. Deep shade limits blooming and can make the stems and leaves too floppy and succulent, providing prime conditions for fungal and other disease problems. So, the best “Goldilocks condition” is growing these plants in partly or dappled shady areas. All garden centers offer these Begonias each spring. A tried-and-true variety to purchase is the “**Non-Stop**” colorful selections.

You can grow these plants from their extremely tiny dustlike seeds, but let’s be realistic—that method is almost foolhardy except by professional growers. Purchasing and raising your plants via those tubers is easier, less time-consuming, and more successful.

# Bletilla — Chinese Ground Orchid

## *Bletilla striata*



This plant is the easiest orchid you can grow. It is not an orchid-like imposter but an honest-to-goodness genuine orchid. This beautiful plant shows us that we should never assume tropically labeled flowers are always 'tropical.' It is hardy from zones 5 to 9 and, as typical with all orchids, grows from small, swollen stem structures called pseudobulbs. The plant produces foot-long grass-green leaves, and by mid-spring to early summer, gorgeous pinkish-purple blossoms resembling Cattleya Orchids bloom abundantly. Oh my, are they stunning!

Unlike most tropical orchids, which grow on tree branches, this orchid is a ground-dweller from China and Japan. It prefers well-drained, moisture-retentive, fertile soil. And, like its tropical cousins, it prefers to

grow in part to 'almost' fully shaded locations. Morning sunlight is agreeable, but these orchids can't stand the bright afternoon sun. The heat and blinding light will cause the blossoms to fade and turn brown.

Yes, tropical orchids are gorgeous, but they are also a pain in the "you-know-where" to raise (for me, at least). Still, this low-maintenance relative is a joy to include in any shade garden. After flowering, the leaves blend in with other plants, so learn what they look like to avoid accidentally weeding them out. They need their leaves to produce enough energy to re-grow and bloom next year. By fall, the leaves die, and the pseudobulb corms go dormant. Please make sure the ground is well-drained so they will not rot. Also, try to avoid over-mulching so the soil is not excessively wet.

These hardy orchids also make excellent container plants for colder-zone gardeners. Allow them to go dormant in the fall, then store the pots in a cool, dark location. Allow the soil to dry, but water occasionally during the winter. By spring, new growth and blooms will develop.

This perennial may be challenging to find in garden centers. Specialty or rare plant nurseries should be a more reliable resource. As with all orchids, raising plants from their dust-like seeds is impractical for most people.

# Caladium — Angel Wings

## Caladium bicolor



The other common names of this plant are “Heart of Jesus” and “Elephant Ears.”

Native to open areas of jungles and riverbanks of Central and South America (especially Brazil), this highly colorful leafy plant has been popular since the late 18th century. Its popularity is not for the flowers (which are rare to develop or see) but for the fantastic multi-colored heart-shaped leaves. Combinations of colors include mottled green, red, pink, and white blotches with contrasting veins.

There are many varieties, and your selection should depend on how much shade your garden or patio receives in the summer. Gorgeous

silvery-white leaf varieties grow best in shaded areas, while vivid pinks and reds look fabulous in partly sunny/shady areas.

No matter where you plant them, please ensure the tubers are in moist soil—never soggy but well-drained, porous ground. They will suffer if left in dry conditions for an extended time and go prematurely dormant.

Larger garden centers should have a few varieties available. Still, your best bet is to purchase them from specialty bulb nurseries (some specialize in growing them.) Here, they offer a vast selection of outstanding multi-colorful leaves.

I must warn you not to plant these bulbs in cold or cool soil for northern or colder garden locations. They will never grow properly and may eventually rot. These plants need a head-start in warm indoor locations — preferably under a horticultural heating mat to provide bottom heat to stimulate growth. Insert a bulb in a small pot (with added moist potting mix) and allow it to grow for a few weeks before setting out the rooted (and leaf-growing bulb) into its garden location. Please wait until early summer to plant your tubers or potted plants outdoors. They need warm soil and air temperatures to grow well.

# Canna

## *Canna indica* and many hybrids



If you desire to add a tropical feel to your flower gardens, you can't go wrong with including these colorful plants. Their striking flowers and large leaves offer plenty of visual enjoyment.

Many varieties flaunt excessively colorful variegated leaves, which look like stained glass windows back-lit by the sun. Some gardeners shyly confess that they enjoy these leaves more than the flowers. Still, the flowers offer plenty of "eye candy" colors. Many varieties showcase brilliant yellow, pink, red, and orange shades intermixed with white stripes and splotches. Strangely, botanists (and growers) discovered that no pure white-flowered species or variety exists.

Cannas are native to tropical and subtropical regions of Central and South America. Over time, different species became “transplanted” into the world’s temperate and other tropical areas. These plants become popular for their ease of culture and adaptability to form hybrids and grow in any garden.

Grown from thick rhizomes, their ultimate height, based on how tall the flower stalk grows, can extend up to eight feet or more, depending on the variety.

All Cannas prefer to grow in full to partial sunlight and continuously moist, highly fertile soil in the garden or containers. These plants thrive in humid conditions but will need regular watering during periods of drought.

Cold-region gardeners (below zone 8) have had splendid success growing these plants by planting the rhizomes in larger containers and setting them outside after the last frost. By fall, bring these pots indoors for the winter. By withholding water during this time, you simulate natural dormancy for the rhizomes.

The critical question is, which tall-growing Canna can you plant? New types are created yearly, with many growing to “acceptably comfortable” heights. If you wish to grow a couple of giants, consider growing ‘**Pretoria**,’ also called ‘**Bengal Tiger**,’ which has stunning orange flowers with yellow-striped (or green-striped?) foliage. It can grow to 8 feet tall or more. ‘**Tropicanna**’ has unique multi-colored variegated leaves highlighted with large, orange flowers. It can exceed 8 feet tall when fully established.

One significant benefit of growing these plants is that they attract everyone’s eyes and pollinators such as butterflies and hummingbirds.

# Colchicum — Autumn Crocus or Naked Ladies

**Colchicum autumnale**



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Here is a lesson on how mistaken identities arise, especially concerning Naked Ladies. Common flower names or nicknames can confuse gardeners when identifying specific plants. That's why a Swedish botanist named Carl Linnaeus (1707 - 1778) devised the binomial nomenclature method of specifically naming each plant and animal. Even long-time home gardeners (ahh...like me) can become deceived by common names about what they think a specific flower is or isn't. If

your identification is wrong, this confusion may lead to unfortunate occurrences, such as poisoning.

Here is a case of mistaken identity involving two unrelated plants with similar nicknames, appearance, and bloom times. *Crocus sativus* (described later) blooms in the fall and has blossoms that resemble those of a close relative, *Crocus vernus*, the spring-blooming Crocus. It is also known as the Saffron Crocus and the Fall Crocus.

The other unfortunate common name is Autumn Crocus, which is shared with this section's subject, *Colchicum autumnale*. This plant is poisonous and should never be used as a saffron substitute. Here, the flowers look similar but are larger and bloom in the fall. At a glance, who can tell the difference without seeing them bloom side-by-side?

Having not grown them, I made this mistake repeatedly each fall when viewing beds of these flowers. I remember telling my sister those flowers were Fall Crocus, but I was mistaken. Now, I (and now you) know how mistaken identities arise.

Okay, lesson learned. Let me get on track and fully describe this unusual and beautiful plant.

There are a few fall garden flowers to admire. Chrysanthemums and Asters always steal the show—and rightfully so—when they bloom with vivid colors. Largely forgotten and rarely planted is *Colchicum autumnale*. As mentioned, it looks like a giant Crocus and is commonly mistaken for one.

One massive difference is that this plant belongs to the Lily family, while Crocus belongs to the Iris family. Crocus grows from corms, while this plant forms bulbs. In the fall, the flowers emerge first, and then in the following spring, the leaves finally grow. By summer, they die back, and the bulb lies dormant until fall when the “naked” flowers emerge.

If you want another fascinating plant (described later in this ebook) having a similar growth habit (and nickname of “Naked Ladies”), it is *Lycoris squamigera*. Here we go, playing the name game again!

*Colchicum autumnale* is very poisonous, containing a toxic compound called colchicine. Like many other plant poisons, when diluted to a safe level, it can ease or control health problems, such as helping to alleviate gout. This chemical also multiplies chromosome numbers in both plant and animal tissue. For plants, this is beneficial for creating new hybrids. For animal tissue, this substance can cause cancer.

*Colchicum* grows well in full sunlight to partial shade and in well-drained, fertile soil. You may plant the bulbs within other plants, including lawns or groundcovers. I once admired a large clump growing within a large swath of Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*). Once planted, they are virtually maintenance-free, except for the occasional watering if the soil becomes too dry in the fall when they are blooming.

You may find it difficult to purchase these bulbs in garden centers. Your best option is to locate them by searching specialty bulb nurseries online.

# Colocasia — Elephant Ears

## Colocasia esculenta



Prepare yourself for being amazed, awed, and slightly overwhelmed when you first encounter this plant. I had mixed feelings when I first encountered it at a garden center. Its enormous height and the massive leaves and flowers thrilled but also partially intimidated me. I felt like Lemuel Gulliver in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. It was when he encountered the land and giant people of Brobdingnag. This plant is amazing!

Growers nickname it "Elephant Ears" or "Taro." The leaves have a coarse texture with prominent veins, but some have exciting leaf colors. Some varieties have the usual green, but many have bronze and "almost" pure black (dark purple) leaves.

Like the leaves, clusters of large, white arum-like flowers are larger than usual. The flower has a modified leaf called a spathe, and the stamens or pistils are on the central yellow spadix. A slightly foul odor associated with these types of flowers attracts pollinating flies.

Elephant ears are easy to grow from bulbs. They can be planted in the garden (remember, they need plenty of space) or in enormous pots, like halved whiskey barrels.

To reach its maximum growing size, it prefers fertile, well-drained soil, plenty of water and fertilizer, and full sunlight to partial shade. The bulbs are hardy from zones 8 to 11, but a freeze will kill the outermost leaves. Northern growers must bring the potted bulbs indoors or to a heated garage for the winter.

These bulbs are found in many larger garden centers or online bulb specialty nurseries.

# Crinum — Giant Spider Lily

## Crinum x amabile



Although the name says lily, this bulb is related to the Amaryllis and Hippeastrum (described later.) The "spider" name is for the long, pink-to-red petals and stamens extending several inches from the flower stalk. Another stunning feature is the leaves' dark green to purple coloration. In a shady location, the leaves arch over and can look like a figure of a giant spider. Yes, it appears so exotic, but, being a tropical plant, it should be!

This bulb and its relations are native to tropical areas of Asia. It is bulb-hardy from zones 9 to 11, but one of those rare winter freeze-ups will kill the top growth. Most gardeners should plant this bulb in large pots or containers and store it indoors in winter.

It is a favorite landscape plant in warm, frost-free locations. When the plant is older, the flower stalk (inflorescence) can tower over five feet. It blooms all summer with a sweet, lily-like fragrance. It loves to grow in partial shade in fertile, well-drained soil. However, it may be challenging to find these bulbs in garden centers.

# Crocosmia

## *Crocosmia montbretia*



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This corm-forming plant will draw in all the neighborhood hummingbirds if you want to advertise your flower garden as “The Place” for casual nectar-sipping dining. Botanists also refer to Crocosmia as Montbretia. The name change confuses unsuspecting people who want to plant these corms in their gardens but cannot find Crocosmia. Flower gardening can quickly begin migraines while searching for obscure, re-named flowers.

Hardy from zone 5 and up, this excessive-flowering, clump-forming plant will give your garden a luxurious tropical atmosphere. The hummingbirds will feel like they never left their winter home. The

leaves are narrow and sword-shaped, like a Gladiolus. The plentiful and extended inflorescent spikes are ablaze with hundreds of fiery red flowers.

From early summer to early fall, there will be plenty of flowers for you and the hummingbirds to have plenty of floral enjoyment. Most varieties are shades of red, such as **Lucifer**, a popular vibrant blood-red type that may have the longest blooming time, to various orange and bright yellow varieties. All act as neon lights to attract the neighborhood hummers.

Most garden centers should offer small bags of these corms alongside the numerous varieties of Gladiolus. If you cannot find them there, many internet nurseries will have them available, including more unusual varieties.

Plant the corms in sunny, well-drained, fertile soil locations for the best blooming. Unlike Gladiolus, you do not need to dig up the Crocosmia corms before winter. Add a protective top mulch by late fall to ensure their winter survival.

# Crocus — Saffron Crocus, Fall Crocus, Autumn Crocus

*Crocus sativus*



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Spring-blooming crocus (*Crocus vernus*) is an extraordinary sight pushing up from the snow-covered ground. For us cold-climate gardeners, their colorful petals are a pleasant sight for our winter-weary eyes. Of all the flowers grown in a garden, they offer a well-needed euphoric relief that winter is nearly over. Daffodils come in a close second, in my opinion.

A close cousin of vernus is *Crocus sativus*, whose common name, Fall Crocus, explains precisely why it is a surprising eyebrow-lifting plant.

This species mirrors its spring-blooming counterpart with beautiful lavender-blue petals from grass-like leaves beginning in late summer. Unlike its spring cousin, each blossom sports long, bright orange to red styles and stigmas. When plucked from the flower and later dried, they are referred to as saffron. If you are a gourmet chef (or, like me, act poorly like one), saffron is an expensive food spice and colorant.

This crocus is hardy only from zones 6 to 8 (on average). Colder zones are problematic because of deeply frozen soil, including soggy soil during the spring thaw. When planting the corms in spring, ensure they will be in full sunlight and the garden soil is well-drained. You will have better luck in corm survival if the ground periodically becomes dry during the summer. Tulips also prefer soil conditions like this.

After a spring planting, you can expect flowering by late summer. Blooming extends for two weeks, while the grass-like leaves may sprout first, during, or after blooming.

You can purchase the corms from larger garden centers or online nurseries in the spring.

Here is an important warning: Please don't become confused by another similar-looking fall-blooming plant, *Colchicum autumnale*, described earlier. It resembles this crocus, but its flowers are much larger. It, too, has the nickname of Autumn or Fall Crocus. This warning is not only for the deceptive appearance, but also because all parts of that plant are highly poisonous if eaten. Well, *Crocus sativus* is not exactly healthy, either. Still, it has those edible, long, filamentous stigmas and styles, which *Colchicum* does not have.

# Dahlia

## Dahlia hybrida



Dahlias have always been a favorite tuberous garden plant since their discovery by early explorers (at the tragic degradation of indigenous people) in Mexico and extending into northern areas of South America. As a member of the vast Aster or Daisy family, over 30 species live in this broad area.

They are not hardy plants — zone 8 and above — to survive underground during a typical winter. Suitable microclimates, such as south-side house foundations, can extend that hardiness to zone 6 (maybe 5 if lucky). For us northern gardeners, we must carefully dig up the plump tubers in the fall and store them in a dark, dry, cool area (like a basement) until spring planting.

A word of caution must be acknowledged here, for those tubers tend to dehydrate and shrivel during that dormant time. You must check them periodically and lightly sprinkle or mist water over them every few weeks. This, too, can cause problems such as severe decaying fungus infestations if the water is retained for lengthy periods. That's a conundrum; either they shrivel to death or become food for mold. I hate to state this, but consider purchasing newer tubers if that happens. If all goes well, replant your surviving tubers in the late spring when the soil becomes noticeably warm. Never plant them in cold soil.

There are two areas I concentrated on when deciding which unique Dahlias you may wish to include in your garden. One area is in flower size, and I base the other on astonishing flower color patterns. Two or three species are significant players in hybridizing our present garden varieties. The size of the flower heads ranges from small ball-type to huge dinner plate-sized. The stems are incredibly sturdy to hold up all these gargantuan flower heads. Petal colors extend to all wavelengths except true blue, but purple varieties are found on several (legitimate) online nursery websites.

Dahlias flourish in many gardens, but don't expect your neighborhood garden center to have many available. You would think they would, but they rarely offer tuberous plants—most are potted, generic seed-grown plants. Your best bet to find exceptionally gorgeous Dahlia variety tubers is through internet searches of rare plants or specialists.

# Dracunculus — Dragon Arum; Dragon Lily; Voodoo Lily

*Dracunculus vulgaris* or *Arum dracunculus*



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How can I describe this plant in a gentlemanly and “cultured” way? This tuberous perennial has a more masculine appearance. Another common name coined by a famous mail-order nursery (*Plant Delights Nursery*) is Viagra Lily. I am not falling into that trap to describe the reasoning behind this nickname.

Occasionally, you may read or see on TV a news-fluff piece about a large tuberous Arum Lily plant called a Corpse Flower (*Amorphophallus titanum*), blooming in a botanical garden greenhouse. Not only is this

plant large and weirdly colorful, but it looks, ahh...“erect”... and smells terrible, like a decomposing human body. People usually describe that, for I hope never to encounter a “dear departed” in such a state. Anyway, it always draws people to ogle and giggle — something nobody does when viewing a petunia, unfortunately.

Although much smaller in size and girth, the Dragon Lily can grow in your flower bed. Granted, it may not be an attention-grabber, laughter-laced, last news item for the six o’clock Action News show. Still, it can be a curious plant for the entire neighborhood.

Hardy in zones 6 and above, it is native to northern Africa, the eastern Mediterranean, and central Middle Eastern locations. Gardeners in lower zones can still plant it in the garden, but must dig up and store it over the winter before the ground freezes. Container growing is also an excellent option for enjoyment. Treat these tubers like you would Dahlias.

This perennial grows like Colocasia or Elephant Ears, described earlier, from tubers and extends long, fan-shaped, dark green leaves. These divided leaves have a “somewhat” appearance of a dragon’s claw — thus the common dragon name. These plants are not true lilies, but people always add the lily moniker to tuberous or bulbous flowering plants.

By midsummer, a fleshy, open vase-shaped fusion of petals, called the spathe, emerges. Extending upward from the inside is the spadix, a long, slender, purplish-black flower stalk. Some people call it the dragon’s tail. Fortunately, I have found no mention of it being called “something else” of a male dragon. This structure contains the stamens and pistils, which usually develop at different times to prevent self-fertilization.

This inflorescence releases a foul odor, not an immediate neighborhood evacuation order of intensity, but not overly horrible. This odor lasts a day or two, attracting flies, the flower’s chief pollinators. Growers advise not to plant this arum near open windows or where you spend your outdoor time. Both the smell and the flies may prove troublesome.

Unsuspecting non-gardeners may suspect you have a hygiene problem or that your sewer system is clogged.

So, where can you plant this smelly dragon? It prefers shady, fertile, and moist (but not boggy) areas. It can tolerate partial sunlight but not constant exposure. Older, well-grown plants can tower up to three feet tall, but expect smaller-scaled results.

# Eucomis — Pineapple Flower

## *Eucomis comosa*



Chalk this up as one of the more unusual-looking summer-blooming plants. When fully established in a garden, the inflorescences, or flower spikes, have an uncanny appearance of a cluster of pineapples. The numerous star-shaped, greenish-white to purple florets are arranged in cylindrical clusters on sturdy 12 to 20-inch-tall stalks. Below them lie a rosette of two-foot-long, blade-like leaves.

This bulb-forming plant prefers abundant sunlight and rich, well-drained soil. Plant the bulbs about six inches deep and a foot apart. Unfortunately, *Eucomis* is not the hardiest of summer bulbs. If you live in a zone 7 or above location, they will live peacefully over the winter.

Lower-zone gardeners must dig up the bulbs each fall and store them in a cool, dry area. By late spring, you can replant them. One extra benefit is to plant the bulbs in containers and enjoy them over the summer and fall. Then, move them into your house and keep the top growth cool and slightly moist until they go dormant. At that stage, keep the soil dry until late spring and begin watering.

# Gladiolus

## *Gladiolus* species and hybrid varieties



“Glads” are probably the most popular summer-planted “bulbs” (actually referred to as corms) for most gardeners. Many nurseries, garden centers, and mail-order bulb suppliers offer many colorful varieties. You name the color, and there are several varieties. Many have intermixed colors. There are no true-blue varieties, but some have eye-catching purple petals.

All glads need to grow in full sunlight and well-drained, warm, fertile soil. Keep the soil moist, not soggy, to keep the plants healthy. Corm size depends on the species and variety, but most commonly offered types have medium to large sizes.

Please don't plant Glads in cold soil for the corms will delay growing and may rot. Cold soil prevents growth, so delay bed or border plantings until late spring, around the same time when planting tomatoes. A vital prerequisite when planting the corms is digging a hole about six inches deep. This depth helps prevent the taller (and full-flowering) single stem from later toppling to the ground.

You can also plant the corms in large containers earlier in mid-spring to get a running start for earlier summer bloom. Here, you can move the containers anywhere on your deck or patio.

Most "glads" are hardy only in zones 9 to 10. Dig up the corms in colder locations in late fall and store them in a cool, dry area until re-planting in late spring.

# **Gloriosa — Rothschild's Climbing Lily; Flame Lily**

***Gloriosa superba* 'Rothschildiana'**



The less familiar names of this bizarre plant are Flame Lily, Tiger's Claw, Fire Lily, and a few others. This small vine is an eccentric Lily family member native to East Africa and Asia. It thrives in tropical forests and grasslands if the climate is frost-free. If you have never seen the flowers of this strange plant, you need to grow it.

Living up to its glorious name, it is, unfortunately, rarely offered for sale in garden centers. One primary reason is that the long tubers are brittle and may break unless handled very carefully. Seeds are also incredibly scarce, and the seedlings need years to grow before flowering. However,

a few online nurseries offer tubers or potted plants, and you should try growing them.

The climbing vines will grow slightly over five feet tall. The shiny, green leaves have their tips drawn out to a small tendril that will wrap around a small twig or other thin but firm support. Scattered along the stems are large, lily-like, downward-facing flowers. The other striking features include the stamens, which splay underneath the petals like wooden spokes of a wagon wheel, and the green style and stigma, which do not hang downward but jut out at an odd 90-degree angle. Such a weird construction of floral parts!

The variety called **Rothschildiana** has wavy, bright red and yellow petals. Named after Lionel Walter Rothschild, 2nd Baron Rothschild (1868 - 1937), he brought this vine to England from his zoological travels in tropical Africa. Lionel was the son of the wealthy Rothschild banking family of England. When not banking and being a member of Parliament, he would venture off (or hire explorers) to parts unknown to collect birds, insects, animals, and the occasional pretty plant for his personal—and later public—museum. It pays to have wealth!

This vine is hardy to zones 10 and 11 and an annual everywhere else. It appreciates full to partial sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. You can plant them in containers, but allow the soil to dry in the fall. Later, store the flowerpot in a cool location over the winter. Water the pots in early spring; soon, fresh shoots will regrow and bloom by midsummer.

All parts of the plant are very poisonous, so keep it away from all mouths—human and pet.

# Hedychium — Ginger Lily

*Hedychium gardnerianum, flavum, coccineum,  
and many hybrids*



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A quick trip to the tropics can be as easy as stepping into your garden. We know these native Asian tropical plants as Butterfly Ginger Lilies or Garland Lilies. First, let's clarify — this group of plants is not the ginger-spice source for cooking. That is another type of plant (*Zingiber officinale*).

Ginger Lilies grow on two types of stems: the first is a thick, fleshy rhizome that develops at or below the soil surface. The second stem is the main leafy shoot that emerges from the rhizome. It produces

fragrant, showy flowers above a shaft of huge, canna-like, dark-green leaves. These blossoms flaunt all the colorful shades of white, yellow, red, and orange.

They prefer warm, partly shaded areas with very moist, fertile soil. If you have a partly shady corner in your garden, this will be a great place to grow it. You will instantly have an illusion of being in the tropics. The plants can grow to six feet or more in ideal settings.

Their exotic blossoms release a beautiful perfume, like gardenia and honeysuckle, from midsummer to frost. You can grow it outdoors in a bed or border, but I recommend planting it in a large container if you live in colder zones. When it blooms, you can move it to where you spend your days and evenings.

Several species are available to gardeners; many larger garden centers should have them. Try to locate the **Vanilla Ice** variety—unique with eye-catching variegated leaves. Beginning in midsummer, it blooms with gorgeous peach or light orange flowers with a darker orange throat, all perfumed with Easter lily and honeysuckle! It is a very vigorous grower.

Gingers are hardy from zones 8 to 11, but they are an annual for colder areas. Propagate them by separating the rhizome joints and storing them in slightly moist peat moss for the winter. Replant them outside after the last spring frost.

# **Hemerocallis — Daylily**

## **Hemerocallis fulva hybrids**



This perennial is ideal if you want a supremely colorful candidate for planting in any flower garden.

In Greek, Hemerocallis means “day beauty,” for each flower lasts only one day. Still, the overall plant bloom time can last several weeks. The plants grow over three feet tall (including flower stalks) and thrive in partial to full sunlight. They are hardy from zones 3 to 10.

Daylilies are not “true lilies” but resemble them. Unlike lilies, these plants do not form bulbs but swollen roots or rhizomes that spread outward and occasionally sprout new plantlets. They are native to China, Japan, and North and South Korea. They quickly spread

worldwide because of their superior hardiness and adaptability to various growing conditions (not to mention their outstanding, simplistic beauty).

One daylily species, *Hemerocallis fulva*, is known as the tiger lily, orange lily, tawny lily, and ditch lily. It is remarkable for growing in questionable habitats that many plants will find “scary.” For example, it grows abundantly on arid roadside banks and ditches. If it blooms here, it can do so in any dry, poor-soil, unmanageable garden.

Foolish people say it is a weed. However, many knowledgeable homeowners have adopted it as an easy-to-grow bedding display. This daylily is the quintessential flower of summer. Like most Daylilies, this species prefers to grow in full to partly sunny locations.

Today, there are billions (not really, but close to it someday) of *Hemerocallis* varieties worldwide, each able to withstand any hot and dry location. Like any other plant, they would prefer better growing accommodations. Your nearby nursery or garden center will have a few colorful potted selections. Plenty of specialty nurseries offer bare-root plants if you enjoy ordering online.

Plant daylilies in well-drained, fertile soil from containers or bare-root clumps. They will take an entire growing season to develop. Still, each succeeding year will display its grandeur without your help by adapting to various environmental conditions, including severe drought.

# Hippeastrum — Dutch Amaryllis

## *Hippeastrum* hybrid varieties



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Sold in numerous grocery stores, retail clothing stores, “Big Mart” stores, and maybe gas stations, these large bulbs, pre-planted in tiny plastic pots, are available near, and weeks after, Christmas. They are intended as a quick, cheap gift for the hope of indoor blooming for a few weeks in the dead of winter. Depending on the size of the bulb, you can expect a corresponding size of the flower display.

With seasonal gullibility, I usually purchase a bulb (always wanting a bright red one) and endure the wait to be disappointed by eventually viewing a white-flowered display. No matter what light level your home allows, the inflorescence (the flower stalk) always elongates to the

point where gravity takes over, topples the flower down, and breaks the stalk. I swear I hear P.T. Barnum laughing and allegedly saying the remark, “*There’s a sucker born every minute.*” For me, it’s every Christmas. Stop laughing PT.

But, I have seriously (and embarrassingly) digressed....

If you can keep your Amaryllis growing (the leaves obviously since the flower(s) will not last longer than a week or so,) transplant your bulb and developing roots into a larger container filled with fresh, fertile, well-drained soil, and place where it can receive winter sunshine (yeah, right) and later place outdoors in the late spring. Place the pot in full sun for the summer and keep it watered until fall.

Now, in the fall, cut back on all watering and allow the potted soil to go dry. You can now trim off the browning strap-like leaves. Transfer your container to a cool, dry, frost-free location in your home.

Now, for the reason of including this plant in this ebook: **Leave this container alone until mid to late SPRING.** Don’t try to water and reanimate your large bulb for Christmas. You want to begin the new growth in the late spring so you can enjoy early to mid-summer displays. The flower stalks grow smaller in full sun, while the flowers grow larger and more sturdy. If you want something to brag about with friends and family, this is how you can really showcase an Amaryllis!

If you live in Zones 8 and above, you have the luxury of planting these bulbs in your flower garden. You can grow them deeper in the soil, and they will eventually establish their “natural” sprout-bloom-grow-rest cycle without your aid.

One species or hybrid, *Hippeastrum x johnsonii*, has brilliant red flowers and can tolerate cool winter-time soil in those warmer growth zones. It withstands the cool, wet soil and begins its natural growth cycle by spring. It was (and maybe still is) popular in the southern areas of the USA. The trouble is, where do you find this species? Try online bulb specialist searches; hopefully, you will find them available.

# Hymenocallis — Spider Lily or Peruvian Daffodil

*Hymenocallis festalis* or *Ismene festalis*



Spring would not be the same without crowds of golden daffodils dancing in the breeze. William Wordsworth saw (rough guess) thousands blooming near a lake and under trees. Viewing a clump of Narcissus in your beds or borders may not be poetic, but it is just as uplifting.

Those flowers last a few weeks, and the show is over until next spring. What a bummer. But what can bloom during the summer that can mimic those daffodils?

*Hymenocallis* belongs to the impressive Amaryllis family, which includes those Christmas gift Amaryllis bulbs. No, they do not bloom as large but have long, blade-like leaves.

The cluster of blossoms on two to three-foot-tall stalks (technically called an inflorescence) has the familiar daffodil-like shape. The thin outer petals flare outward like spider legs, while the inner, delicate, membranous petals fuse to form a cup. Viewing these flowers for the first time, they look “almost like” daffodils but have a noticeable but exotic dissimilarity. One feature that made these plants more enjoyable is their powerfully sweet perfume, exuded primarily in the evening and during the night.

Although most *Narcissus* bulbs are hardy in cold climates, these South American bulbs are hardy only in zone 8 and above. Although all gardeners can plant the bulbs in their gardens, only warmer winter locations allow them to remain in the ground. All cold-climate gardeners need to dig and store these bulbs over winter. Like your Amaryllis gift plant, you can easily place the bulbs in large containers.

Flower color depends on the species; most have white petals, such as *Ismene festalis* '**Zwanenburg**' (shown above), but others sport eye-catching yellow blossoms, such as *Ismene* **Sulphur Queen**.

These plants (garden and container-grown) prefer partial sunlight and moist, well-drained soil. By late summer, allow the bulbs to endure drier soil to “harden them up” by late fall. Container plantings can remain in their pots but withhold water for most of the winter. This is extremely important, for the bulbs will not bloom in the summer without this dry-rest period.

# Iris

## *Iris germanica*



There are many varieties of the large bearded iris, also known as German Iris (*Iris germanica*), available to gardeners. Botanists call them bearded for the prominent, fuzzy, yellow, or orange hairs on the inner petals.

They grow from rhizomes, or horizontal, thickened stems. You plant them shallowly (horizontally with the ground), with one-half of the rhizome sticking out of the soil. You can do this from spring to early fall. Over time, new rhizomes branch outward and form compact clumps. One word of caution: try not to step on them, especially during the winter.

Grow these irises in full sunlight and well-drained soil. The flower stems can reach 3 feet tall and bloom in late spring or early summer, lasting for about two weeks or more. Yes, they don't have a long bloom time, but are stunning with all those vivid colors. All are hardy from zones 3 to 9.

Check your local garden centers for the larger-blossomed, modern varieties. Online nurseries specializing in Irises offer a wider selection, including fragrant and historically rare varieties.

I recommend finding and purchasing varieties listed as “rebloomers” or those that bloom again in mid to late summer. They provide an interesting way to impress your gardening friends.

# Kniphofia — Red Hot Poker; Tritoma; Torch Lily

*Kniphofia galpinii; northiae; rooperi;  
thomsonii; and hybrids*



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The only thing that can get you burned by this vibrantly colorful plant is mispronouncing the Latin name. I am notorious for butchering Latin names, so I wasn't close to saying it correctly. Most botanists pronounce its name "nuh-fow-fee-uh." There. We can all rest easy now to avoid severe mental anguish.

Here is a handy-dandy tip: When in doubt about saying a Latinized name in public, say it quickly, your way, and then talk about the plant. People don't have time to think about whether you said it correctly or if their pronunciation has always been wrong. If someone questions your pronunciation, smile and ask them to say it. Then smile again.

I'm sorry about my brain train's sudden derailment of thought. Oh well, back to the matter at hand.

When looking at the above photo (or an actual flower spike), the common nicknames are self-explanatory. Depending on the species or variety, these spikes are single to multiple-colored with crimson red, bright orange, or yellow.

The flowers change color as they develop. The bottom yellow blossoms are mature and ready for pollination. Further up the spike are the young, underdeveloped, bright red flowers. These act like a diner's neon lights to attract hungry customers—in this case, flocks of touristy hummingbirds.

Native to South Africa, *Kniphofia* is hardy from zones 5 to 9 and prefers to grow in sunny and well-drained, fertile soil locations. Having that lily-like nickname, you may think this plant grows from bulbs, but it doesn't. It forms spreading clusters of underground rhizomes. The foliage resembles large clumps of coarse, thick-bladed, serrated grass. Three to five-foot-tall flower spikes arise from these clumps from late spring to midsummer.

Like daylilies (*Hemerocallis*), as the rhizomes expand, more flower spikes develop. After a few years of age, you can expect large clusters of these gorgeous flowers. Your neighborhood hummingbirds will thank you for this early summer treat.

You can easily find *Kniphofia* potted plants online or in mail-order nurseries. Garden centers, though, may prove questionable in having them available. Be prepared to experience difficulties communicating this plant's name and nursery workers' acknowledgment of it.

## Lilium — Lily

*Lilium auratum; orientalis; canadense; regale plus more species and hybrids.*



No garden is complete without a lily's beauty, grace, and wonder. Most can grow "reasonably tall," but some will tower above our heads when grown in optimal conditions.

Lilies form true bulbs with overlapping, thickened scales. Please don't break off these scales, for you will jeopardize the full functioning of the entire bulb to produce the leafy stems and the multitude of flowers. Most, if not all, lilies prefer to grow in a mostly sunny location. They grow best with well-drained, fertile, loamy soil. Avoid places that retain water, as the wet soil will eventually rot the bulbs.

When planting the bulbs in spring or fall, ensure the bottoms are nearly six inches below the soil surface. Most species and their varieties are hardy from zones 4 to 9. However, plant them deeper for all colder winter zone locations and cover them with thick mulch to prevent excessive soil freezing depths. Once planted, leave the bulbs alone. Let the lilies thrive and multiply to experience an abundance of future blooms.

Your greatest challenge when growing lilies is determining which lilies to plant. We are accustomed to the traditional Easter Lily sold in pots and possibly the ever-popular Tiger Lily. Still, there is a vast world of other lilies rich in color and fragrance, and you will love to have them growing in your garden. By perusing bulb catalogs in print or online, you can gain an immense understanding of the wide diversity of species and the untold number of varieties available for inclusion in most gardens. Most species and their varieties are very hardy. Don't delay in enjoying the large, colorful, and sometimes aromatic blossoms.

Growers classify one group as Oriental Lilies, which will grow over five feet tall, many up to eight feet or more! They bloom by midsummer and continue flaunting their stunning petals by fall. Like most garden lilies, they prefer to grow in full to part sun and fertile, well-drained soil. If the garden experiences windy conditions, tie the stems to a support pole to prevent breakage. It's worth the trouble to perform this action.

In 1974, California lily breeder Leslie Woodriff created an upward-facing lily named '**Stargazer**' (shown above.) What a glorious name for this stunning plant! It is an oldie-but-goodie variety still grown by nurseries today. Historically, this lily has been a significant genetic contributor to the creation of many other lily bulbs sold today.

Predecessors of this lily (based on wild species heritage) had their large flowers hang downward. They were pretty but hid their genuine beauty unless you crawled underneath on your back to view them. That is a rather undignified (and dirty) position for any gardener to experience.

Developed in the early 2000s, double-flowered Oriental lilies (known as Rose-Lilies) took the gardening world by storm. For example, the

variety called *'Thalita'* Double Flowered Oriental Lily resembles 'Stargazer' but with multiple petals. As of this writing, it may be a mutation of 'Stargazer' or a unique look-alike. No matter, for it has beautiful colors and a high-octane perfume.



Another variety, **Conca de' Or**, shown above, should be raised in every garden. The first time I saw this lily, it was over my head. I had to look up, and all those gorgeous eight—to nine-inch-diameter blossoms looked down at me. One added benefit to having lilies at this level is that the fragrance is closer to your nose without stooping over.

This lily has enormous—and I mean massive—blossoms! They are white with an interior of bright lemon yellow, and the stamens are brick-red.

Growers classify this lily as an Oriental/Trumpet hybrid (called Orienpet Lilies). After growing for at least three years, it can reach as tall as eight feet. It is hardy from zones 4 to 9.

# Lycoris — Naked Ladies

## Lycoris squamigera



It's not what you think. However, you can have some fun with your friends by saying, *"Come on over to see the naked ladies in my garden!"* This nickname is one of the several common names for this perennial bulb. The other names are Surprise Lily, Magic Lily, and Resurrection Lily. These nicknames are used because the flower stalks grow out of the ground in late summer before the leaves develop. Yes, you read that right. This plant is one of those curious oddities Dr. Seuss would grow in his garden (with help from Thing 1 and Thing 2).

Seeing them blooming may also surprise you since the stems blend well with other plants. Some gardening authorities (yes, just like the know-it-all ones from your garden club) suggest planting them with Hosta

plants. I have the foggiest notion why. Maybe they want them covered with large leaves. I say to plant them where you can enjoy their bare-stem beauty!

The bulbs will bloom for three weeks or more. After that, they form seeds and then die back to the ground. Here today — gone tomorrow. About a week or two later, the leaves will emerge and grow. They stay this way over the fall and winter. By late spring, they die back, and the bulbs go dormant until mid to late summer. Then, the cycle begins again. These plants may have come from an alternate universe!

Believed to have originated from China, Korea, or Japan, they are hardy in zones 4 to 10 and love to grow in full to partial sunlight and well-drained soil. It is important not to disturb these bulbs. Plant and forget them except for fertilizing and watering when they are in growth. Don't dig them up or transplant them!

Many people say the Amaryllis-like blossoms have a sweet fragrance, while others swear they smell like a natural gas leak. No matter, the beauty of those lovely pink flowers is for eye-catching appeal. Growing these bulbs is the only way for most guys to have naked ladies in their garden without having marital issues and police intervention after neighborhood complaints. Oh well guys, hope springs eternal!

# Mirabilis — Four O’Clock

## Mirabilis jalapa



The Latin name of these plants means “marvelous,” referring to their floral beauty. That word describes why they should grow in your flower bed. More detailed information about these plants might help.

The other name for these flowers is “Marvel of Peru,” for they originate in this region of South America. An old-fashioned fragrance garden would not be complete without these delightful, colorful, and wonderfully scented flowers. Do they bloom at 4 O’clock? If they get sunny conditions, they wait until the evening to bloom, but if grown in more partly shaded areas, they can bloom late in the afternoon. One thing is for sure—don’t set your watch by them!

Each bushy plant can grow almost two feet tall and has hundreds of flowers. The blossoms bloom all summer and fall, releasing a beautiful, sweet, jasmine-like perfume into the evening air. Enjoying your garden on warm summer evenings with this scent is a match made in heaven.

Mirabilis can be a perennial in zones 8 to 10 if protected from frozen or soggy winter soil. Each plant can regrow from the thick, woody taproot or tuber. You can dig these up before winter and store them in damp peat moss over the winter. Replant them in the spring after the last frost, or get a head start by allowing them to begin their new growth in containers safely inside your house. By summer, they will produce thousands of blossoms.

You can find easy-to-germinate seeds by viewing online garden nurseries or print catalogs.

# Ornithogalum — Star of Bethlehem

*Ornithogalum saundersiae; thyrsoides*



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Atop thick sword-shaped foliage and 12 to 24-inch spikes are dense, ball-shaped clusters of star-shaped, small, white blossoms highlighted with greenish-black central ovaries. “*Well, that’s... nice,*” you may think, but what is really amazing is that they are exceptionally long-lasting, either in the mid to late summer garden or as a cut flower for indoor displays.

This large bulb, a member of the lily family, originally hails from southern Europe, the Middle East, and northern Africa. It thrives in full sun and well-drained, fertile soil. Planting in rock gardens or gravelly areas would be ideal for these plants. Unfortunately, it is hardy only

from zones 7 to 10, so all lower zones need to dig up the bulbs before the fall freeze-up. Allow these large bulbs to remain dry over the winter, and then plant six inches deep in the late spring soil after the last frost date.

Many growers recommend planting these bulbs in large containers to admire the flower balls up close. Being in the containers, they can remain undisturbed without being re-dug for better results.

A similar species with similar growth and hardiness is *Ornithogalum thyrsoides*, commonly nicknamed the Wonder Flower. This species differs from the *saundersiae* species because it has larger white florets on conical spikes. Native to southern Africa, this species blooms from late spring to mid-summer and is also hardy from zones 7 to 10. Colder zone gardeners should also dig up the large bulbs in the fall.

One common nickname for this species is Chinchinchee. I am showing my age here, but popular singer Perry Como (May 18, 1912 – May 12, 2001) once sang a song named “*Chinchinchee*”. What the lyrics signify about this bulbous plant is questionable, but I remember the unusual name of this song. I also remember watching Como’s Christmas and Easter specials on television with my parents. (I would have been embarrassed to acknowledge this with my “early rock-n-roll preferred” childhood friends.) Perry had a perfect melodic voice.

# Oxalis — Wood Sorrel; False Shamrock Plant

*Oxalis triangularis* or *Regnellii triangularis*  
“Purple Shamrock”



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These South American and South African bulbous annual plants can pass as a botanical doppelgänger to clover plants. They have clover-like, three-lobed leaves (some have four — lucky you) resembling shamrocks. It will not confuse ‘you Irish folk,’ but it may do so with others.

When in bloom from early to late summer, you can immediately tell they are not clover, for they have clusters of five-petaled white to pink blossoms. Some tetraphylla species varieties have beautiful rose-red flowers. Look for the four-lobed type called “**Iron Cross**,” for a dark burgundy “cross shape” is in the center of each green leaf. Its flowers are a stunning rose-pink.

Oxalis are tender bulb-forming plants hardy to zones 7 to 10, but a few species can muster zone 6 if well mulched. They can be transformed into houseplants if given plenty of light. Most Oxalis prefer sunny locations in a garden setting, but can tolerate some shade. Our specific example of a dark-leaved species/variety likes bright sunlight to display its leaf coloration.

The varieties sold for gardens are well-behaved but slowly spread when grown in higher growth zones. Wild species can become weedy and a nuisance to gardeners and greenhouse growers.

The “**Purple Shamrock**” variety (shown above) has either wine or reddish-purple to dark purple leaves. The flowers are white, some with an added hint of pink. Compared to other plants in this ebook, they offer little of the “WOW factor” to be included in a garden setting. Still, if grown in containers, they are noticeable in the leaf color and mistaken for clover. That will cause visitors to ask, “*Why are you growing those weird clover plants?*” Play along and simply say, “*Because they are weird.*” Weird is good in any flower garden!

Garden centers may sell these two varieties (and others) as potted plants for transplanting into late-spring gardens or containers. Specialty growers should also have dormant bulbs available for springtime sales.

# Peony — Herbaceous and Tree Peonies

*Paeonia officinalis; Paeonia × suffruticosa*  
*varieties*



These gorgeous plants need not be introduced since gardeners have treasured them for generations. In many recorded instances, they can outlive the people who plant them, thus growing with future generations of a person's family.

Noted for their large and fluffy flowers on leafy stems, they bloom in late spring to early summer. These plants need a chilling or cold time (aka winter) to stimulate flower buds to form.

Many peonies have different fragrances, such as lemons, roses, honey, spices, and musk. Sometimes, a type may smell of dead fish. Do

extensive research before purchasing any peony to avoid getting something “fishy.”

One major classification of peonies is herbaceous, meaning they grow like “regular” perennials but sprout from growth buds on thick, woody, underground rhizomes. This structure appears like a gnarly chunk of wood. All growth dies above ground by winter, but new spring-growth buds live just under the woody surface.

Plant all peonies in full sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. They are hardy from zones 3 to 8.

The regular maintenance of these outstanding perennials provides support for the flower stems and also for periodic removal of the spent blossoms. Over countless years of breeding, Peony blossoms have become larger and heavier. So heavy that they can bend over to the ground. Not lovely, but what can a gardener do? One easy method is to purchase metal support rings (something similar to tomato cage wire hoops) to hold the developing flower stems and buds upright. Once done, enjoy the outstanding colors and fragrances of your Peonies.

Most larger garden centers offer a few newer varieties, either as potted plants or bare-rooted, 3-to 5-growth “eyes” rhizomes. Online specialty nurseries offer older (but still wonderful) heirloom varieties.

The other classification of these plants is called Tree Peonies (*Paeonia × suffruticosa*).

Okay, the name is not what it appears to be. Peonies do not grow as tall as Oaks (that would be weirdly amazing). Like “regular” peonies, they develop above the ground from woody rhizomes. Remember not to cut back or damage these wooden structures when planting them. When raised in prime conditions, these plants can grow nearly five feet tall in over ten years.

To the untrained eye, Tree Peonies will look the same as herbaceous Peonies. Still, they will have larger flowers on substantially taller plants. Unfortunately, they are also more expensive.

For new gardeners, I recommend purchasing the herbaceous varieties first so they can experience their delightful blossoms and understand how they grow and develop.

# Polianthes — Tuberose

## *Polianthes tuberosa*



This delightfully fragrant plant from Mexico forms a bulb or thickened tuber. From midsummer until a frost, a spike of medium-sized, single to double, waxy, rosebud-like flowers opens in the warm evening air. They release one of nature's most potent, syrupy-sweet perfumes, like gardenia, hyacinth, lily, and jasmine combined.

A long time ago, funeral directors would intermix floral displays with these flowers. The reason was to help mask the odor of — you know... the dear departed. Well, it eventually lost its popularity. You don't want someone to mention your garden smells like a funeral home. Ultimately (and with better techniques to preserve a dead body), this plant regained its acceptance when added to garden displays.

Another little-known fact is that King Louis XIV of France planted hundreds of these flowers in the Grand Trianon's flower beds at Versailles. Each summer evening and throughout the night, their combined fragrance was so overpowering that it made people ill. Many people learned to flee the area before sunset. In a letter from Madame de Maintenon dated August 8, 1689, she states: *"We have to leave the Trianon each evening on account of the tuberose; men and women alike find themselves overwhelmed by the power of their aromas."*

Well, if you want to "get even" with your horrible neighbor, here is one unique way of doing so!

This plant grows well in a sunny location with well-drained, fertile soil and makes an excellent container plant. This is especially important for northern growers to help coax the bulbs to bloom earlier. Tuberose is sensitive to cold temperatures; it likes it hot, and is garden-hardy only to zones 8 to 10.

Two forms are available—the single or double petal flowers. Both types have beautiful perfume, but the single-flowered variety blooms earlier. If raised in a container, allow the soil to dry over winter. By spring, resume watering (with a top dressing of fertile potting soil) and keep the pot in a warm, well-lit area. Wait until all threats of frost are passed before placing the container outside near where you spend your summer evenings.

# Ranunculus — Persian Buttercup; Turban Buttercup

*Ranunculus asiaticus*



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You have probably seen these potted plants growing in florists or garden centers next to springtime-offered multi-colorful pansies, violas, and primroses. New gardeners may be perplexed into thinking they are multi-petaled roses, but they are far from being so.

These colorful beauties are large, multi-petaled buttercups closely related to our familiar yellow, wild, meadow buttercups (*Ranunculus repens*) and distantly related to columbines and delphiniums. To confuse you even more, the single-petal varieties of this species look

uncannily like Oriental Poppies! And to venture even further into weird lookalikes, some people even compare the flowers to those of small blooming peonies.

No matter what they appear to resemble, those mega-petaled blossoms display many gorgeous colors ranging from light pink to deep rose pink, red, yellow, white, and eye-opening orange, with various intermediate creamy shades to boot. Goodness sake, they are all spectacular!

*Ranunculus asiaticus* is one of several species available to gardeners, but it is the most admired due to its gorgeous petals. These plants can be grown in a garden, a container, or a pot. They grow from stem tubers with characteristic “claws” or projections. When planting these tubers, the claws must be placed about two or three inches downward into the soil.

Like most summer-blooming bulbous plants, this plant is only hardy to Zones 8 and above. Colder zones need to dig up the tubers late in the fall when the plants begin dormancy. They must be stored in dry to slightly moistened potting soil until replanted in the early spring, preferably after thawing.

Ranunculus species detest hot growing conditions, unlike most summer-blooming bulbous plants. The plants prefer to grow in cool conditions from early spring to midsummer for the best growth, development, and bloom potential. They like to grow in very fertile, well-drained soil in plenty of sunlight. If your afternoons are noticeably hot, find a spot that is partly shady at this time.

These plants make excellent container-grown plants and are also valued as cut flowers for indoor displays, lasting up to eight days in a vase. The plants grow to a maximum of two feet and are slightly less wide, with dark green, serrated leaves like those of carrots or parsley.

Garden centers and bulb specialty nursery catalogs offer several varieties and some species of these plants. One popular variety is the **Tecolote Strain**, which features several multilayered, excessively

petaled, bright colors, including bicolor pastel shades. This strain provides the largest flower diameters—up to five inches across.

# **Scadoxus — African Blood Lily; Cape Tulip; Pincushion Flower; Powderpuff Lily**

*Scadoxus multiflorus*



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Any flowering plant with several nicknames must be particularly special. This is one unique bulbous plant! Native to Africa and the Middle East, it is a member of the Amaryllis family.

Consider our familiar winter-flowering Christmas Amaryllis gift plant. Instead of displaying, at most, four huge flowers on a single large stalk, this plant produces hundreds of tiny red florets arranged as a large

spherical umbel on a large stalk. They also collectively form a striking halo of bright yellow pollen-tipped anthers.

The stalk arises first from the bulb, producing these softball-sized umbels. After flowering, a rosette of bright green strap-like leaves begins to grow.

Although like our common *Amaryllis*, it is considered a blooming container-grown houseplant, you can plant the large bulbs in a bed (or, better yet, in a large container) for midsummer blooming. This plant prefers growing in well-drained, fertile soil and a partly sunny location. Place each bulb about a couple of inches deep under the soil surface.

*Scadoxus* is not hardy – only to zone 9 or 10 (we don't come across this limitation too often) and must be dug up before the weather turns cold by fall. Move it to a cool indoor area if raised permanently in a container. If the leaves begin to turn yellow, stop watering and allow the bulbs to start a winter slumber. Begin watering again by spring and place the developing new growth in plenty of light. Wait until late spring, well after the last frost, to replant the dug-up bulbs or transfer the container outdoors.

# **Sprekelia — Aztec Lily; Jacobean Lily; St. James Lily**

## ***Sprekelia formosissima***



If you had to describe the flower of this bulb (without viewing the above picture), it would resemble a red-flowered Christmas Amaryllis crossed with an orchid. On average, these bright red flowers are four inches long and appear before the leaves. There is one flower per 12 to 20-inch-long stem. How many stems appear depends on the age and size of the bulb.

Place each bulb about four inches deep in well-drained, fertile soil in late spring. Sprekelia prefers plenty of sunlight to develop and bloom well. It is not a hardy bulb—estimated for zones 7 and above—so be

sure to dig up the bulbs in the fall and store them in a cool, dry, dark area until late summer.

As usual with most of the plants in this ebook, you can plant them in outdoor containers for more up-close, eye-catching appeal. Like those popular Christmas Amaryllis, *Sprekelia* can be started indoors in pots for indoor wintertime blooming. I recommend timing the blooming for those tundra-bleak days of January or February. Anything as colorful as these flowers will be cheerfully welcome.

# Tigridia — Tiger Flower; Shell Flower

## *Tigridia pavonia*



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When you see these flowers, you must restrain yourself from loudly shouting, “*They’re grrreat!!*” Sorry, Tony (and Kellogg’s), for stealing your trademarked approval statement.

Grown from small corms, *Tigrida* blooms sporadically all summer with 3 to 6-inch diameter, flared, cup-shaped flowers. The petals are fused to form this cup-like shape. The base colors of the petals are shades of yellow, red, pink, orange, and white. The cup’s interior is heavily spotted (even striped like a tiger) with a contrasting color, usually bright red. They are gorgeous!

These flowers are attached to stiff, 1-to-2-foot stems above gladiolus or iris-like, sword-shaped leaves. The only “disappointing” remark about these flowers is that they last only one day. However, more flowers eventually bloom, extending your viewing pleasure for several weeks during the summer.

Hardy from zones 7 and above, we colder climate gardeners need to plant these corms in the late spring. Insert them four inches deep in well-drained, fertile soil and in a sunny location. They can also be grown in containers to better appreciate those beautiful flowers.

By fall, before or after the first light frost, carefully dig up the small corms (with the leaves still attached to them for better recognition). Transfer them to a container to dry in a cool location. Label these corms for replanting in the spring for immediate recognition.

# Zantedeschia — Calla Lily; Arum Lily

## *Zantedeschia species*



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This well-known plant is usually offered as long-lasting cut flowers. Still, it will also be acceptable for container plantings. If you live in Zone 7 and above, you can get it by planting it in a garden setting, specifically near a watery area like a pond or water garden pool. Don't have a watery area? No problem – grow these plants in constant moisture-retentive, fertile soil and partial sunlight for best growth and flowering. Colder lower-zone gardeners must dig up the tubers and store them dry over the winter.

Calla lilies are members of the unusual Arum family with a colorful “hood” called a spathe and an interior “rod” called a spadix containing

tiny florets. The spathes, depending on the species and their many varieties, display a wide range of colors, including vibrant pink or rose, bright yellow, purple, gothic black (actually, deep garnet).

The classic white species, *Zantedeschia aethiopica*, highlighted with a vibrant yellow spadix, is historical, as represented in old paintings emphasizing simplistic beauty. Some Calla lilies display white spots or specks in their deep green leaves.

In the past, this “lily” was associated with death and displayed in funeral parlors or homes. Today, all sorts of other flowers are shown, but these plants can still be related to death since all parts are highly toxic if eaten and could be fatal. Let’s just enjoy those large leaves and the colorful but unusual flowers.

# Zephyranthes — Rain Lilies

*Zephyranthes minuta; grandiflora, and other species*



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Native to the southeastern United States, Mexico, and Central and South America, most *Zephyranthes* species bloom, depending on the hemisphere, from mid to late summer, with vivid pink to white crocus-like blossoms after a period of extended drought followed by a soaking rainfall.

This unique blooming habit surprises many growers, who think the plants will never bloom, but wait until a refreshing rain. This plentiful blooming arises from ever-expanding tufts of slender but perseverant

grass-like leaves. You must exercise caution to know the difference between these leaves and regular grass to prevent unintentional removal from a flower bed or border.

The small bulbs are planted a few inches deep in well-drained, fertile soil and sunny locations for maximum blooming. Like many others in this ebook, this plant is hardy in zones 7 to 10. For colder lower zones, they need to be dug up in the fall and stored in a cool, dry area for the winter. Alternatively, they make excellent container subjects and can be kept undisturbed.

## Conclusion

A common denominator for most of the above plants is that they are not exceptionally hardy compared to our well-known, hardy, spring-blooming bulbs. For those experiencing cold-climate gardening, you need to dig up those “almost dormant” tender plants and store them dry indoors for the late fall and winter months. Another alternative is to plant them in containers and later bring those containers indoors in the fall.

One significant problem is that we may forget to do these actions and regret it after the soil freezes and kills those tender plants. This may be why most summer-blooming bulbous plants are less popular or commonly grown in our gardens. Saving these outstandingly beautiful plants may be time-consuming and laborious, but it is well worth the potentially high initial cost.

An additional incentive is that these plants form propagational offshoots. After one season of growth, you can be assured of additional plantlets from one plant. That is an excellent future investment and incentive to keep the plants alive for additional regrowth and increased population.

Don't hesitate to grow these plants for they provide additional colorful brilliance from the previous year's sunny days. They are the best rechargeable batteries you can own and enjoy!

# **Thank you for reading this ebook**

I hope this publication has enlightened you to the many summer-blooming bulbs and bulbous-like plants you can plant in your flower garden. These, and others not listed, will provide your gardens with additional beauty for several weeks.

Please visit my author website, <https://gedwinvarner.com> for information about my other gardening ebooks and contact information.

## **About the Author**

G. Edwin Varner grew up on a farm, helping his father in the crop fields and assisting his mother in the flower and vegetable gardens. This experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

He successfully owned and operated a fragrant flower mail-order nursery for twenty years. Unlike most mail-order nurseries publishing colorful but expensive pictorial catalogs, his frugal catalog extensively described the flowers he grew. He once said, "I write a thousand words worth a picture in my catalogs." Today, he has the same style of writing (thankfully with fewer words) through a variety of enjoyable and informative ebooks. This time, the ebooks include color photos of each flower.

He encourages you to cultivate something unique and beautiful in your gardens. His motto is "Read about it, see it, grow it, and enjoy it!"

G. Edwin Varner lives in a rural area of northeastern Ohio, USA.