

Plant of the Week: Rainlilies Thrive in the Neglected Garden

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY Laura Bellmore

Rainlilies are very easy to grow and are very drought tolerant. They dependably produce a flush of delicate, crocus-like flowers in shades of white, pink or yellow and other shades several times throughout spring, summer and autumn.

Rainlilies will be on the list of featured plants for the upcoming Master Gardener Ornamental & Perennial Sale 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, October 12, at the Wayne Johnson Community Center in Carbide Park at 4102 FM 519 in La Marque. On Saturday, September 28, from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. at the Wayne Johnson Community Center in Carbide Park, Heidi Sheesley, owner of Treeseach Farms, will provide a preview of

plants that will be featured at the plant sale. Heidi's preview will afford gardeners an opportunity to consider the range of ornamental and perennial plants that will be available. Area gardeners have come to appreciate the range of plants offered at the Ornamental & Perennial Sale—plants that are Texas tough and performs well under our growing conditions. Rainlilies are about as low maintenance as any perennial can get. I would recom-

mend rainlilies to any gardener wanting to turn a brown thumb into a green thumb. These small bulbs earned the name "rainlily" because they often flower within a few days after rainfall. Sounds like an unbelievable sales pitch but it is true. My rain gauge at home registered slightly less than 3 inches of rainfall from last Saturday's pleasant round of rains. On Sunday evening I noticed that my patch of rainlilies has already



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sent up a mass of flower buds that will be opening soon.

They are very easy to grow and are very drought tolerant. From spring through fall, rainlilies produce flushes of delicate, crocus-like flowers in shades of white, pink or yellow and other shades depending on the species.

Generations of sharing gardeners have spread the rainlily. In fact, rainlilies can be found in local landscapes even if the home that once stood there has been long gone or vacated. Such a circumstance is the best testament for rainlilies' reputation for being really tough plants. Even the neglectful gardener should be able to grow rainlilies.

The blooms last for two-to-three days but new flowers continue to develop for several days, creating flushes of flowering. The flowers close at night.

Rainlily bulbs produce clumps of attractive, grass-like blue-green leaves that range from a few inches to more than a foot in length. The botanical or scientific name for rainlily, *Zephyranthes*, is derived from a Greek mythological figure. Zephyrus was the Greek god of the west wind that typically brought the rainfall with which these plants are associated.

Rain lilies won't be the flashiest bloomers in the garden but they naturalize well so look for more pop up color with each passing year after they have

been planted. And they weave in and around your established plants beautifully, filling in bare areas.

Rainlilies can be planted in pockets throughout the garden or mass plantings can be established to create large, majestic sweeps of blooms. They perform best under sun or part shade.

Rainlilies should fit the needs of the most casual gardener and several cultivars will be offered at the upcoming Ornamental & Perennial Sale on October 12.

I have already noted that rainlilies are about as low maintenance as any perennial can get. However, you will have to plant them. Should they be forgotten afterwards, gardeners nevertheless will very likely be rewarded with surprising flushes of colorful blooms over next year's gardening season.

Try planting rainlilies as they ask for very little in return—who says low maintenance is necessarily low interest!

Seminar on Texas-Tuff Plants for the Home Landscape

The Galveston County Master Gardeners are a terrific group of volunteers that brings an unrivaled level of expertise, hands-on experience and passion to the art and science of gardening. I have asked several Master Gardeners to share their expertise, experience and passion with Galveston County

residents.

Master Gardener Sandra Devall was the first to answer the call. She will provide a PowerPoint program on choosing hardy landscape plants that tolerates our Gulf Coast weather conditions. Sandra is a fourth-generation Texan whose passion for gardening was inspired by her parents. She will discuss plants that have performed well in her home landscape over the years as well as highlighting ways to maximize the visual appeal of your home landscape.

The seminar will be conducted from 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. on Tuesday, October 1, at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office in Carbide Park (4102-B, Main St. La Marque). Pre-registration required by phone (218-534-3413, ext. 12) or e-mail (GALV3@wt.net) or website (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>).