

Rain Lilies Thrive in the Neglected Garden



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Dr. William M. Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

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PHOTO CREDIT: Laura Bellmore

Rain lilies 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 several times throughout spring, summer and autumn.

Rain lilies are about as low maintenance as any perennial can get. I would recommend rain lilies to any gardener wanting to turn a brown thumb into a green thumb.

These small bulbs earned the name "rain lily" because they often flower within a few days after rainfall. Sounds like an un-

believable sales pitch but it is true. In fact, within two days of rainfall brought on by Hurricane Hanna, the Golden Yellow Rain Lilies (*Zephyranthes citrina*) in my home garden promptly sent up an attractive mass of flowers. Many of my gardening friends also favor pink rain lilies (*Habranthus robustus*).

Pink rain lilies are a favorite landscape plant of Laura Bellmore, a gardening friend and retired co-worker, and are shown in the photo accompanying this article. And, yes, she shared some of her bulbs and I look forward to seeing these new additions adding cheerful splashes to my home landscape.



Rain lilies are very easy to grow and are very drought tolerant. From spring through fall, rain lilies 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 rain lilies. In fact, rain lilies 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 rain lilies' reputation for being really tough plants.

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.

Rain lily bulbs produce clumps of attractive, grass-like blue-green leaves that range from a few inches to more than a foot in length, depending on species. The botanical or scientific name for most species of rain lilies is *Zephyranthes* which is derived from the name of 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.

Rain lilies 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.

Rain lilies are also well-suited for growing in containers on a patio. They do best when crowded and slightly pot-bound.

I have already noted that rain lilies 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.

Rain lilies should fit the needs of the most casual gardener; even the neglectful gardener should be able to grow rain lilies.

Try planting rain lilies as they ask for very little in return!

GARDENERS' Q&A

Question: I have a Schefflera in a well-lighted indoor location. There is very little leaf drop, but the tree has a great deal of sap dripping from the leaves onto the carpet which has become sticky as a result. Can you tell me the cause and how to treat it?

Answer: Based on the information provided, the most likely problem is an infestation by scale insects which produce honeydew (the clear, syrupy, sap-like substance

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described). While aphids and certain other sucking insects can also produce honeydew, Scheffleras are more likely to be infested with scale insects. These will appear as brown bumps on the twigs and leaves which can be scraped off with a fingernail.

Scale insects are difficult to control, especially if they have spread to other plants in the area. However, there are insecticides which can be used to treat scale insects. You should be sure to select one which is labeled for use on interior houseplants.

Insecticidal oils and soaps may be your best low toxicity option if the plants must be kept indoors during treatment. If plants cannot be moved outdoors for a conventional insecticidal spray, Bayer Advanced offers "2-in-1 Insect Control with Fertilizer Spikes" to provide systemic control in addition to providing fertilization.

Be sure to periodically inspect the plant for re-infestations of scale insects.

