

Beautiful Surprises Sometimes Happen in the Garden



Photo provided by Marie Harrison Master Gardener Volunteer with the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Okaloosa County.

Marie Harrison is a Master Gardener Volunteer with the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Okaloosa County .
<http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>

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My string lily is a gift from Aunt Gladys, my Mississippi gardening buddy. On each trip to Mississippi to visit my family, her house is a necessary stop. Like all my other gardening friends, she's likely to have something beautiful growing in her garden at almost any time.

On one such visit I discovered a string lily. What a beautiful surprise it was! It was growing vigorously in her front flower bed. I remarked at the time that it looked just like the lily that I see blooming in streams and boggy places in the park near my house and along the banks of the Mitchell River in Walton County . I had, however, tried to grow that lily in my garden, but had been unsuccessful.

The flowers are quite distinctive. Tall flower stalks arise from the ground and hold milky-white, starlike flowers well above the foliage when they are in bloom. Beginning in July and continuing through the summer, the pinkish buds open to reveal large, fragrant flowers. Rosy stamens perch above the flowers, giving them an ethereal, spidery look. Strap-shaped leaves provide substance in the garden until frost.

Later I learned that Aunt Gladys' lily was *Crinum erubescens*, which closely resembles our native *C. americanum* that blooms in the park and along the banks of local rivers. As a matter of fact, the two look like identical twins. Gardeners, however, will have no trouble deciding which one they have. *C. erubescens* grows well in ordinary garden soil and will rot in boggy soil. *Crinum americanum*, on the other hand, grows and blooms only on boggy or wet sites.

If you are able to get string lily for your garden, plant it in ordinary garden soil and give it some protection from harsh afternoon sun. While some fertility is desirable, too much will cause the plants to grow too vigorously.

Foliage is killed to the ground by a freeze, but it comes back up reliably in spring. Rhizomes run about quite

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freely in good garden soil, so division may be required. A boundary or structure may be needed to keep plants within bounds.

Getting additional plants is as easy as dividing the wide-ranging roots. Plants are easily dug and replanted where desired or potted up to share. *C. erubescens* grows well in tubs and other containers. As a matter of fact, tub culture is sometimes recommended as a method to keep growth within bounds.

I found references in the literature to this plant by several different names. Some are: *Crinum americanum* 'Robustum', *Crinum americanum* forma *erubescens*, and *C. americanum* var. *robustum*.

According to Scott Ogden in *Garden Bulbs for the South*, there is a miniature form of this crinum. It behaves much like the larger *C. erubescens*, but tiny flowers only reach about six inches tall. He suggests that this diminutive version would be useful as a small-scale groundcover.

My string lily is one of my garden's beautiful surprises. I was pleased to find a form of it that grows well in my garden. Keep your eyes open for such a lily in gardeners' yards. Ask for a start of it, or order from on-line sources. I found several listed on the web. It's worth searching for.

Say: KRY-num er-yoo-BESS-kens

Family: Amaryllidaceae (Amaryllis Family)

Other names: String Lily

Origin: South America

Zones: 7-10

Light: Partial shade

Water Use Zone: Moderate

Size: 1-3 feet tall

Soil: Organic, well-drained

Salt tolerance: Moderate