

“Favorite Flowers of the Chesapeake Master Gardeners”

***Gloriosa superba* ‘Rothschildiana’ by Yen Bao**

Common name: Gloriosa lily

Family: Colchicaceae

The first time I saw this flower was at a local flower and garden show many years ago. It was in an underwater contemporary flower arrangement in a large clear glass structure. It was so breathtakingly beautiful that I decided right then that I got to have the plant. It



turns out that the flower comes from a vine grown from tubers which are quite readily available from mail order catalogs. There are several cultivars giving different flower colors, but the ‘Rothschildiana’ is the most popular. I bought three of those tubers from a local supplier, and every year since, I have been rewarded with the exotic beauty of those flowers. The tubers multiply over the years, and I was able to share them with friends and family.

Gloriosa lily is hardy in zone 8-10, native to tropical Africa and Asia. In early spring, plant the tubers (elongated or elbow shaped) horizontally 2-4” deep and 8-12” apart in an organically rich, medium moisture, well-drained soil in full sun or part shade. The vines will soon emerge, grow quickly to 5-6 feet clinging to a trellis by tendrils formed at the tip of the leaves, and bloom from June to August. When in bud, the flower faces downward but when in bloom, the petals are strongly reflexed backwards. The flowers are 4 to 5 in. wide with six wavy-edged petals that are ruby red with yellow bases and edges, and large, bright green stamens and pistils that spread out below the petals. The colors will deepen as the flower ages. Sideway, a flower may look like a butterfly with folded wings. The flowers are also very long- lasting, and a simple arrangement in a vase is still very eye-catching.

This deciduous plant will overwinter in the ground if mulched well in Chesapeake, or the tubers can be dug up, allowed to dry, then stored in peat or vermiculite at 40-50 °F. However, as the striking flowers are the main reason to grow this plant, it is best in a patio container with a trellis so that it can be enjoyed up close. In fact, the container care is quite simple. As the growing season ends, reduce watering to induce dormancy. Bring the pot inside a garage and stop watering. The vine will die back and become loose from the soil, facilitating clean-up. In the spring, when the night temperature outside is steady at or above 40°F, bring the container back out, restart watering, and the plant lifecycle will begin again.

The plant is deer and rabbit resistant. All parts of this plant are poisonous if ingested.

Photos by Yen Bao

References:

www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder

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