CRINUM BULBISPERMUM —
the flower of the
Orange Free State

In containers, in mass plantings or even in swamp gardens, the Orange River Lily makes a spectacular sight.

text and photo by Ian B. Oliver, O.F.S. National Botanic Garden, Bloemfontein.

This versatile genus was first described by Linnaeus in his Species Plantarum in 1753. Crinum is found in the tropics in Africa, Asia and America, and also extends into the temperate regions of both hemispheres. There are approximately 150 species world-wide, of which more than half come from Africa, and 21 species occur in southern Africa. Crinum bulbispermum (Burm.f.) Milne-Redhead & Schweickerdt is recorded in all four provinces in South Africa. It grows along river and stream banks or in moist hollows in black pot clay or sandy soils.

Cultivation
Crinum bulbispermum makes an ideal garden subject. It seems at home in a variety of soils, loam sand, clay and even loose gravel. The attractive flowers appear in mid-October (southern hemisphere) for 3 to 4 weeks.

This species is accustomed to very hot summers of up to 40 °C and cold dry winters down to −0.8°C. It thrives in semi-arid conditions, especially along dry water courses, apparently relying mainly on summer thunderstorms for moisture. In some cases the plants may stand up to their necks in centimetres of water for weeks on end. This hardy bulb can also withstand years of severe drought, and grow in full sun in the wild.

This bulbous plant can be used very effectively in landscape design and is a suitable subject for a city park, botanic garden or the home garden.

Planted in a pot it makes an ideal container plant. Remember to give a sunny location and feed with a foliar feed in the last month of winter. They usually look their best when planted in a mass, and when in full flower they make a spectacular sight.

Orange River Lilies can be used to their full advantage in water or swamp gardens.

Propagation
Crinum bulbispermum is very easy to propagate. Once the seed sack has burst open the mature seeds can be gathered. The ripened seeds are green/white in colour. The seeds can either be sown directly in the ground or in seed trays (the seed trays should be at least 12 cm deep to allow for root and bulb development).

Sow the seeds as soon as possible as their viability is short lived. The seeds should be sown barely below the soil surface.

Germination in warm weather (approximately 30 °C) is quick. Ensure the soil is kept moist. The bulbs will develop quickly after their first year, and can be planted out at the end of their second season; flowers can be expected from the fourth year. One of the advantages of sowing seed in situ is that translocation is easy when the bulbs are dormant in winter.

Pests
In southern Africa the only important pest is the yellow and black striped Amaryllis caterpillar. Eggs that are deposited on the leaves quickly hatch under warm conditions. The young larvae soon begin chewing their way through the inside of the leaves, and if left unchecked they can penetrate and destroy the bulb. A mild contact insecticide should remedy the problem.

This is not only an attractive and versatile plant, but also a very exciting subject to grow.

Bibliography

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