About twenty years ago I found a huge bulb lying about in a deserted Zulu kraal near Piet Retief, and presuming it to be indigenous promptly planted it in my Pretoria garden. Lo and behold it surprised and delighted us with a beautiful umbel of delicate pink lily flowers on a tall stem—Crinum moorei! Belonging to the family Amaryllidaceae it was first described by J. D. Hooker in 1874 from a plant cultivated by Dr. D. Moore, director of the Botanic Garden at Glasnevin, Dublin. The large bulbs have increased over the years and formed large clumps, the top portion of the bulb clearly visible above ground, and the seeds germinate well. Young plants bloom in their third year. New leaves are produced in spring, and flowering takes place from about December to February.

The next addition to the garden was a gift of Crinum graminicola bulbs. These rare beauties are found in the open grassveld around Pretoria. The flowers are dark pink, short stemmed, the broad, hairy leaves forming a flat rosette, and they are usually the first to flower in spring after being dormant for months. Unfortunately the bulbs, that seem to disappear completely in winter, don’t seem to multiply, and I have had no success with the seeds.

Crinum campanulatum from the Eastern Cape, does well in a pot, placed in the pond in August. Almost immediately the straplike leaves appear, followed by the trumpet-shaped flowers, initially pale, darkening to a deep rose colour. The seed heads tend to bend down to distribute the seeds that germinate easily. I obtained the bulbs from a nursery. To see a vlei or pan in the Alexandria and Bathurst district with a mass of vlei lilies in full bloom is breathtakingly beautiful.

Crinum bulbispermum is a popular garden plant, with its large greyish-green, arching leaves, folded upwards along the midrib, the margins fringed by tiny stiff hairs. The flowers are narrow and funnel-shaped, pale pink, with a dull red stripe on the keel. The huge bulbs are dormant in winter, as are those of Crinum macowanii which has a lovely umbel of large drooping, pink flowers. These produce about three inflorescences in succession. After a devastating hailstorm in October, two years ago, I cut the plants back severely and within days new leaves appeared and the plants flowered profusely. They are named after the botanist Peter Macowan (1830-1909).

The striking fanlike arrangement of the greyish-green leaves of Crinum buphanoides makes it a lovely accent plant. Buphanoides refers to its resemblance with Boophone. It grows in the Northern Province and Mpumalanga, flowers in late October to December, but has surprised us with blooms in February. The bulbs are massive, and the star-like flowers face upwards, which is unusual for a crinum. I have counted forty-five pink-flushed flowers on one umbel, and with their delicate perfume, like most crinums, they are quite bewitching. The large seedheads look spectacular, as every seed is beaked. They sow themselves readily in the garden, and bloom in their second or third year.

Crinum variabile from Nieuwoudtville and Crinum delagoense (candy-striped crinum) are the latest additions to my collection, the latter stems from Mpumalanga- I am anxious to see them flower.

The amaryllis caterpillar can be a menace, so beware!