KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“Summer Bulbs”

March 17, 2020

On a wonderful trip to Ireland several years ago, I discovered the enchantment of the Lucifer Crocosmia. The tall strappy leaves were a nice base for some wild arching branches that ended in brilliant red flowers. I was in love before I even learned that hummingbirds are crazy for the plant, too.

Once I was home again, I looked everywhere for crocosmia plants – no such luck. That’s when I discovered the world of Summer blooming bulbs that are planted in the Spring. Or corms, in the case of the Crocosmias.

Bulbs and all their relatives are interesting things. We all know that plants will grow from a seed. But bulbs or corms, tubers or rhizomes are really very much like seeds – everything needed to grow is there, waiting inside the often papery covering. Most of us grew up with daffodils, the harbinger of Spring, without realizing that the firm, healthy bulb we plant in the fall has leaves and a complete flower already formed inside. It’s quite magical.

You may also have some experience with Summer bulbs if you’ve ever grown Dahlias which are rhizomes, like irises. Unlike the Summer blooming iris, however, Dahlias cannot survive a hard freeze such as Central Oregon has in Winter. You can grow them, of course, but you MUST dig them up every Fall, clean them up a bit and save them in a non-freezing location like an attached garage or a basement. If you check them regularly, keep them dry and free of mold, you can re-plant them in the Spring once the hard frost days are over.

Even though Spring blooming bulbs get more attention and some Summer Blooming bulbs require more work to survive, there are many we can enjoy here in Central Oregon.

Gladiolus have always gotten my attention, standing tall in the back of the flower bed. But, like the Dahlias, they always required lifting in the fall and I never seemed to catch the timing right, and they usually froze. Recently I learned of a hybrid Glad that survives down to Zone 5 and maybe a bit colder with a timely mulch cover. Even more wonderful is the name: “Bride” because it’s a bright white. If you’re curious, look up Gladiolus colvillei. The transcript of this broadcast will be on our website and has the correct spelling with links.

If you’re shopping, don’t overlook the Crocosmia that I first saw growing wild in the damp hedges in Ireland. The 1” corms, if planted in a sunny area, will produce leaves almost 3’ tall with branching stems of bright red tubular flowers for the hummingbirds to enjoy most of the Summer.

There’s also Lily of the Valley, a modest little plant that spreads well in a shady area with sweet bell-like flowers on stems above the leaf crown. They smell wonderful and don’t mind cold winters. If you chose them, be sure to give them plenty of room.

Have you enjoyed the sight of hanging planters of Tuberous Begonias? Try growing them this year and, if you plant them in pots, your winter care will be much simpler – just bring them inside.

Lilies can stop you in your tracks with their flamboyant blooms. They don’t mind our cold winters but, unfortunately, the deer find them the tastiest meal. If you really want to grow them and are willing to sacrifice the gorgeous scent, grow the Asiatic lily. But if you’ve fenced out the beasts, you can grow the wildly scented Oriental or the delicate Turk’s Cap Lily. You’ll be delighted you did.

For more information on Summer flowering bulbs, go to our website to read this transcript. And for all your gardening questions, contact the Master Gardeners during the growing season from April to October at 541-548-6088. This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV’s The Point.

Resources:

A volunteer-written encyclopedia with information about thousands of flower bulbs <https://www.pacificbulbsociety.org/pbswiki/index.php/HomePage>

The Portland Iris grower, Schreiner’s, has a wonderful catalog to introduce you to irises: <https://www.schreinersgardens.com/>

University of Vermont Extension, “Summer Flowering Bulbs” <https://pss.uvm.edu/ppp/articles/sumbulbs.html>

Clemson Cooperative Extension, “Summer and Fall Flowering Bulbs <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/summer-and-fall-flowering-bulbs/>