

# Make New Friends: Meet Crinum Lilies



One of the interesting things about being a gardener in HHP is to meet new plants that you can grow here, but that you have never heard of before. Let me introduce you to **Crinum Lilies**...

I've often heard gardeners in our area complain that they can't grow tulips and other Northern bulbs that require chilling hours. But one interesting group of bulbs in the South that is the envy of Northern gardeners is Crinums. Crinum lilies are beloved in Southern landscapes because of their tropical beauty, plus they are versatile landscape plants. They can tolerate drought or wet feet, hot blazing sun and a freeze. In other words, they are real work horses. My Crinums have endured (and survived) both flooding and freezing temperatures.

Crinums are in the Amaryllidaceae family so are close relatives of Amaryllis, Zephyr Lily, Narcissus, and Spider Lily (Hymenocallis). Most of these plants are from climates that range from warm temperate to tropical temperatures. The Crinums are no exception, as some are cold hardy in zone 8, while others are more tropical and will survive only in zones 10 and 11 (We are in zone 9).

One of my first Crinum lily sightings was next to a defunct store on 278. The building was no longer occupied and decrepit, but the Crinum, C. 'Ellen Bosanquet', was still going strong, in the boiling heat, without irrigation, nor an owner to care for her. She was a six-foot-tall and -wide specimen plant with a tall flower stalk and deep pink flowers. Needless to say, I had to pull over!

You might think all Crinums are big and take up lots of space, but that's not so. There are many species and lots of varieties on the market so you can select based on your needs. Heights range from 13 inches to 6 feet, plus they come in several flower colors. As summer temperatures and rains occur, a thick flower scape (stalk) emerges just beside the neck of the bulb. In about ten days, flower buds will open to display lily-like flowers at varying times. Depending on the type of Crinum, flowers can be various shades of white, pink, rose, or striped (C. Milk & Wine'). Some flowers will also change colors as the blooms age,

transitioning from white to pink to deep rose. **Leaves** are **evergreen** unless killed back by the cold and are arranged in a spiral around the neck of the bulb. Leaves are sword- to strap-shaped and some are wavy along the margins. Most are green but there are some with purple leaves, and even a variegated variety!

Although Crinum lilies will adapt to different soil conditions, they grow best in soil that is well-drained. Crinums will grow in full sun or partial shade and some benefit from a little shade during the heat of the day. Crinums are supposed to bloom in June, and maybe in Fall, but mine have not 'gotten the message'. They happily bloom in February and March for me. Plants need minimal fertilizer applications, but most Crinum enthusiasts recommend a couple of applications each year to increase flower production. A liquid fertilizer drench in the spring is especially beneficial.

Use Crinum lilies in the landscape as specimen plants, as a border plant, in a mixed perennial bed, or as a container plant. If growing in a container, plants like to be pot bound with the neck of the bulb exposed. They are practically indestructible so are very durable regardless of their location.

Spring and summer months are the best time to plant Crinum lilies. They may be available at local nurseries, but you may need to check online to find some of the more unusual varieties. In purchasing a bulb, be sure to buy the biggest bulb you can afford. Smaller bulbs may take several years to bloom.

When planting, find the "neckline" of the bulb – the point where its color transitions from white to green. Dig a hole six inches deeper than the neckline, place the bulb in the bottom, and cover it with soil. That's it. Add organic mulch, like pine straw, around plants to help conserve moisture and increase organic matter as the mulch decomposes. In the event of a hard freeze, the leaves may be killed back but the plants should come back from the bulbs. Pulling up mulch around the base of the bulbs will help protect the plant during a hard freeze.

'**Ellen Bosanquet**', which has beautiful wine-red flowers, is likely the most widely planted Crinum in the South. It is tolerant of cold and drought and multiplies readily. Ellen Bosanquet only started blooming for me this year, in March, about 3 years after I planted it, but despite the terrible frost we had this winter.

My favorite so far is **Crinum 'jagus'**, also known as St. Christopher Lily, because it can be grown in a mixed perennial bed. Although other plants may be in bloom, my St. Christopher Lily is always 'the showstopper'. This plant reaches a more modest 2 to 3 feet in height and a matching spread, which makes it perfect as a border or accent plant. Blooms arise on tall leafless stalks amid upright dark green strap-like leaves. Unlike some other Crinum varieties, its leaves stay attractive throughout the year and do not 'flop'. The white flowers resemble lilies and are fragrant.

Crinum lilies are poisonous and can be a skin irritant so make sure to wear gloves when pruning or handling and keep pets and young children away from plants. Because they are poisonous, just like daffodils, and other members of the Amaryllis family, they are typically not bothered by **deer**, rabbits or squirrels, a boon in HHP!

If you are looking for a versatile landscape plant that is practically indestructible, consider adding a few Crinum lilies to your landscape. I think you will be happy with the addition.

Some Sources: The Southern Bulb Company, Jenks Farmer, Longfield Gardens, Plant Delights Nursery.

**Some Examples:**



**Crinum 'Sangria'**

- ❖ Zones: 7a to 10b
- ❖ Flower Color: Pink
- ❖ Foliage Color: Brownish
- ❖ Height: 48" tall
- ❖ Light: Sun to Part Sun



**Crinum 'jagus' ( St. Christopher Lily)**

- ❖ Zones: 8-10 (Grows well in HHP)
- ❖ Bloom Period: Spring
- ❖ Bloom Size: Large 3-5" trumpet
- ❖ Flower Color: White
- ❖ Foliage Color: Green
- ❖ Height: 12"-24"
- ❖ Light: Partial Shade to Full Sun
- ❖ Fragrance: Light and Sweet
- ❖ Reliability: Very Reliable



**Crinum 'Ellen Bosanquet'**

- ❖ Zones: 6b to 10b
- ❖ Dormancy: Winter
- ❖ Flower Color: vivid Cherry red
- ❖ Foliage Color: Green
- ❖ Height: 24" -36" tall
- ❖ Light: Full Sun to Partial Sun
- ❖ Flowering Time: Late Spring & again in Fall