

For many years I have tried to acquire and grow a bulb of the native *Crinum americanum*. I find it difficult to find any bulb by this name, but through the years I have acquired several bulbs so named. The rest of the story is a personal essay on my trails.

The true *Crinum americanum* is a swamp or marsh dweller from Texas, along the Gulf Coast, through Florida up into North Carolina. It is always found in watery conditions and it is supposed to be quite hardy. In my several acquisitions of the "American *Crinum*," I would plant it in the wettest area that I had and the bulb would always rot. I began to wonder if my colder winters than South Louisiana was the cause of the bulb demise. All references to the growth habits stressed that it was a wetland species, called by the common name "String Lily," "Swamp Spider Lily," among other names.

About five years ago I acquired "*Crinum americanum*" which I planted in ordinary garden soil and location and it prospered. It bloomed in mid summer with scapes up to about two feet tall. These ended with two sheaths which split open and four to six individual pinkish buds, which developed into almost pure white six-tepalled flowers. I could readily understand why the name "String Lily" would develop, in spite of it's not being a true lily. Not only did the original bulb bloom, but also several bulb offsets romping about in a rather vigorous manner. At last, I thought, I had the native *Crinum* under control and it was doing fine. Then perhaps two years ago I went with friends to Mercer Arboretum in Humble, outside of Houston. The place was beautiful, always something in full bloom and I could have spent days there. I wandered through a forest of yaupon to a shallow pond with all sorts of aquatics in bloom and about the banks was one of North America's most complete collections of *Crinum*. There were many that I had never heard of, mostly species from all over the tropical and near tropical areas of the world. None that I noticed were blooming that day, neither do I remember any hybrid cultivars growing. What I do remember were the many "String Lilies" in full bloom in the standing shallow water of the pond, amid the water hyacinths and other water loving plants. These "String Lilies" appeared just like my dry soil bulbs, but here they were growing in standing water!

Later I discussed with Glen Melcher of Pineville, Louisiana, a breeder of ornamental and fruiting plants about why my American *Crinums* differ from those at Mercer Arboretum and in the books. The discussion turned to Scott Ogden's book, *Garden Bulbs for the South*, a book I frequently read and re-read. On page 139 under "Swamp Lilies," Ogden discusses my situation. He states that there are two look-alike *Crinums*. One is native but rare in cultivation because of its need for wet conditions (*Crinum americanum*), and a tropical drylander (*Crinum erubescens*), which is often sold as *Crinum americanum* 'Robustum.' The only difference that readily distinguishes between them is that the native is an aquatic or boggy condition grower, the tropical South American species will not grow in water, but in ordinary garden conditions. This is not the only parallel to species in the Southern United States and in subtropical South America where similar climatic conditions occur. My conclusions: I do not have the native *Crinum americanum* of the Gulf Coast and South Atlantic Coast. But what I have is a beautiful plant, well worth the little effort in growing.

Carl Amason is a superior plantsman who lives and gardens near Calion, Arkansas. He can be contacted at PO Box 164, Calion, AR, 71724.