

Bring the Tropics to You

If the economy has you bemoaning the loss of your tropical vacation, why not bring a little of the tropics to your own home. Plant a pineapple lily. Not truly a lily or a pineapple, the eucomis (commonly called pineapple lily) is a member of the hyacinth family (Hyacinthaceae). It is a South African native whose bulb is edible and was used as a food source by African tribes. The name eucomis is derived from the Greek word “eukomos”, meaning beautifully haired and refers to the tuft of green leaf-like bracts that crown the flowers. The tuft on the end of the flower stalk resembles a pineapple; hence, the name – pineapple lily. The flower stems can be up to two feet tall topped with racemes of star shaped flowers. The foliage is just as striking as the flower stalk with its foot long strap shaped leaves.

The most common cultivars include:

- *E. bicolor* has pale green, purple-edged flowers and green wavy-edged leaves.
- *E. comosus* “Oakhurst” starts out green and changes to deep burgundy with magenta purple buds.
- *E. comosus* “Sparkling Burgundy” does the opposite. It starts out burgundy and changes to green with a purple stripe later in the season.
- *E. autumnalis* – has wavy-edged leaves and green almost chartreuse flowers.
- *E. autumnalis* ‘Stricta’
- *E. punctata* (white, pink, wine) is the prettiest species of this group
- *E. pole-evansii* is a harder to find species with stalks reaching up to 6 feet.



E. autumnalis



E. 'Oakhurst'



E. comosus 'Sparkling Burgundy'

All eucomis make great feature plants either sown directly in the garden or in a container. Planted en masse, they make a stunning border.

For all their drama, the eucomis is relatively unfussy and easy to grow. Like the drama queen it is, it is slow to wake up in the spring. Be patient. The foliage will put on a show of its own and depending on the cultivar, will put on its color changing show as it gets ready to show its flowers. The blooms are long lasting and cut stems will last up to 6 weeks. Bloom is followed by an attractive seed pod. With the dramatic foliage, the long lasting blooms, this specimen puts on a season long show.

Plant the bulbs 6" deep in the garden or closer to the surface, just below the soil level in a container. The bulbs are cold hardy to 19° F and as long as they do not sit in wet situations, they can go undisturbed for years. Plant them under the eaves in full sun or light shade. They do best in fertile soil amended with compost and they are relatively pest free. In an area with hard freezes, treat them like dahlias and dig them up to be planted again in early spring. Be aware, that frozen soil or overly wet winter conditions will turn the bulb to mush. The plants can be propagated by removing the bulb offsets in the spring and growing them in a nursery bed. Seeds take two to five years to produce a flowering size bulb.

Partner them with a hardy banana or canna lilies. Then put on your flip flops, kick back in your lounge chair and enjoy a tropical retreat.

References

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