

## Eucomis

by Yolanda Wilson

The bulbous perennial called Pineapple Lily has a crown of leafy bracts resembling the top-knot on a pineapple. The botanical name, *Eucomis*, has nothing to do with pineapples, but comes from the Greek *eukomos*, meaning "lovely-haired." There is no scent of pineapple associated with *Eucomis*. The flowers either lack fragrance, or in some cases have an unpleasant smell.

*Eucomis* flowers generally appear in late summer – July through September. Individual star-shaped flowers are densely packed around a thick stem, forming a cylindrical, six-inch long, erect raceme. Flower colors range from white through greenish-purple to dark purple. Attractive seed capsules follow the generous flowering period.

*Eucomis* last well as cut flowers. The glossy green strap-shaped leaves emanating from the base of the plant are one to two feet in length and three to four inches wide.



Eucomis 'Royal Burgundy'

Raceme: A long flower cluster on which individual flowers each bloom on small stalks from a common, larger, central stalk.



Eucomis 'White Dwarf'

Most *Eucomis* originate in tropical or southern Africa, and most are rated hardy in Sunset zones 4–9 and 14–24, or USDA zones 8–10. Plant *Eucomis* bulbs in the fall or in spring after danger of frost. Position the bulbs at a depth of five to six inches in full sun or light shade in fertile, well-drained soil that has been amended generously with humus. Mix a handful of bone meal with the planting soil. In zones where *Eucomis* is marginally hardy, provide a warm, south-facing site, such as at the base of a wall, and mulch heavily. Since *Eucomis* plants perform best when left undisturbed, give them adequate growing room (one square foot per plant) when you plant them. Dig and divide *Eucomis* only in case of overcrowding. To help the bulbs endure a rainy winter, mulch with evergreen boughs or coarse hay topped with heavy plastic. If necessary, bulbs may be stored in dry peat in a cool (50 degrees F) spot during the winter. Fertilize in spring with a complete organic fertilizer. Suggested companions for *Eucomis* include *Coreopsis*, *Hemerocallis*, *Kniphophia*, *Leucanthemum*, *Rudbeckia*, *Salvia*, *Sedum* and *Verbascum*.

*Eucomis regia*, *E. zambesiaca* and *E. vandermeui* are smaller and less frost-hardy than other *Eucomis*, so are usually grown in containers, but all *Eucomis* grow well when containerized. Set the tips (noses) of the bulbs slightly below or just above the soil surface. Toward the end of the season, gradually withhold water and let the foliage die back. Store the bulbs in their containers in a frost-free, dry location where temperatures will be cool (40 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit).

*Eucomis* can be grown from seed started in spring or fall, but the plants will not bear flowers for at least two, and possibly as many as five, years. Leaf cuttings, taken early in the season, are often successful as a means of propagating *Eucomis*.

You will have no difficulty finding information about *Eucomis* varieties and cultural information on the web. Try any or all of the following sites.

[The African Garden](#) – dozens of pictures!!!

[Peter Knippels flowerbulb site](#)

[Eucomis bicolor](#), NC State University

[Eucomis comosa 'Sparkling Burgundy'](#) Great Plant Picks.

[Eucomis](#), Pacific Bulb Society

[Eucomis comosa 'Oakhurst'](#), Terra Nova Nurseries

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