

# Lilies through the season in a Cotswold garden

Patrick Bucknell

Not all lilies will flourish in calcareous soil. Some species love it; others need to be grown in pots of ericaceous compost. Asiatic hybrids and martagon hybrids should do well in the ground, but oriental hybrids based on *Lilium auratum* will not. Lilies bought in flower in the market will usually flourish and increase in the garden, even if they have been forced into flower out of season. In this article, a follow-up to *Growing lilies on chalk and limestone* [Spring 1995, Volume 17, No. 1], I'll describe the species in the order of their flowering this year in my garden, along with three lilies\* which do not really qualify for inclusion, but which I can highly recommend.

The weather in 2012 has been unusually wet and cold. Some lilies have liked the warm rain and grown higher and finer than ever before, while others have suffered from fungus diseases which unfortunately require chemical intervention. Bright scarlet lily beetles have also been active.

*L. pyrenaicum* is an indestructible plant which increases slowly. It usually grows to about 60cm, but this year it was nearly 90 and really fine, though two or three weeks later than usual. It has an unattractive scent.

**8 June**



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*L. martagon* (white)

The typical species is deep pink; it doesn't grow tall here but it clumps up well, and is exquisite. The white variety grows more strongly in my garden, 60–90cm high, and increases slowly. Martagons are plants for light shade. Their leaves tend to go brown but this doesn't prevent them from flowering well, or from coming up again. One group that I wished to split had gone so deep that I couldn't get them up!

**27 June**

Early on, when my tiger lilies were about 145cm high, I noticed black, soft, rotten leaves near their growing tips. They were successfully tackled with Vitax Yellow Sulphur Powder: the tips grew through and the disease did not recur. By the beginning of June, the leaves of many plants began to go brown, starting at the lower levels and spreading upwards. Treatment with Bayer Fungus Fighter, a systemic fungicide, was unsuccessful – perhaps because it was washed off by succeeding showers. Finally, rotten spots appeared on the leaves of auratum hybrids, which the Bayer product took care of. In past years I have been pleased with Rose Clear Ultra, which deals with insects and diseases – I don't know why I didn't use it this season.

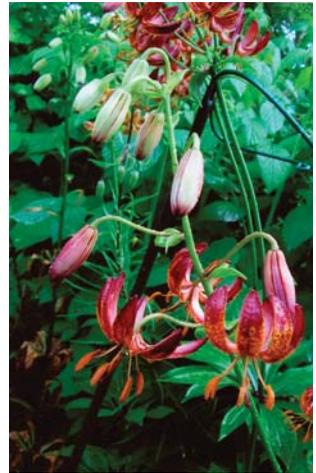
Lily beetles were not numerous and I picked them off and crushed them. To deal with any that were better hidden, I sprayed a couple of times with Provado Ultimate Bug Killer, but Rose Clear would have done as well.

Next year I intend to spray susceptible plants such as Madonna and martagon lilies regularly with Bordeaux Mixture, from the moment they develop leaves.

Please do not be put off growing lilies – nearly all plants have their weaknesses. I hope that these photographs and descriptions will demonstrate that lilies make a good show even in disadvantageous conditions. 🐞

***L. martagon* hybrids.** Various attractive hybrids are available. This is only their second year so it's too soon to judge their longevity. (One clump developed yellowish leaves and misshapen flowers; they went into the dustbin, in case they were infected by a virus – better safe than sorry.)

**27 June**



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***L. x dalhansonii* 'Mrs R O Backhouse'**, a 90cm-tall martagon hybrid which likes a shady position. It was bred almost 100 years ago by the eponymous Mrs B. in Herefordshire. Another good old hybrid, if you can find it, is 'Marhan'.

**27 June**

*L. x testaceum* is claimed to be the first hybrid ever (*L. candidum* x *L. chalcedonicum*). An exceptionally choice lily, with a lovely scent, about 120cm tall. It shares the characteristics of the Madonna lily, and should be planted just below the surface of the ground. Very long-lived but doesn't increase – I bought mine at least 50 years ago and at present have only two plants!

**28 June**



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*Asiatic hybrid, L. 'Connecticut King'*, is easy to grow, long-lasting, about 90cm tall. Similar lilies come in orange: turk's cap, upward-facing, outward-facing, etc.

**5 July**



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*L. nepalense*\* is exotic and lovely, about 90cm tall. I grow mine in a large pot of John Innes ericaceous compost. As it is stoloniferous, it pushes itself to the edge of the pot. It spends the winter in an unheated greenhouse and comes out in June. It wants a lot of water and should never dry out, even in winter.

**5 July**



© Patrick Bucknell

*L. regale* is surely the most beautiful and best-scented lily. It grows 120–150cm tall and, once established, it competes successfully with neighbouring shrubs but doesn't increase. This year all my regales were struck down by some fungus disease and this was the only one that managed to flower. Normally it is healthy and trouble free.

**10 July**



***Gloriosa superba* 'Rothschildiana'**\*. The climbing, glory or flame lily breaks all the rules – but if you have a conservatory, give it a go! I've tried it several times – my son gave me one in flower, and this is a descendant. I don't claim to know the secret of getting it started. It comes from a rain forest and loves humidity, so it needs lots of water and should never dry out in winter.

**5 July**

***L. candidum***, the Madonna lily, is a gorgeous, white lily with supreme scent, 120cm tall. It was in my garden when I arrived, and is a typical cottage-garden plant. It is the only lily that should be planted at surface level where it develops a rosette of leaves on top of the bulb in the autumn. It's susceptible to fungal infections and this year they nearly all succumbed. It really prefers a sunny spot with not too many neighbours, although the one here is surrounded by thalictrums – did they keep off the botrytis?

**16 July**



***L. pardalinum*** just loved the rain and grew 150–180cm, which it's never done before. From California, it likes to see the sun, if there is any. The flowers are striking, though scentless. A very healthy lily, which increases well and is much admired by visitors.

**24 July**

**L. ‘Anastasia’** contains genes from *L. henryi* and from oriental lilies so it’s worth trying in calcareous soil. The first year, I grew it in a pot and after flowering put it into the ground. It grew strongly to about 120cm and flowered well, but the colour has nearly left it – whether from excessive rain or because the soil is unsuitable should be revealed next year.

**31 July**



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**L. lancifolium ‘Splendens’**, the tiger lily. Despite the advice of various experts, I’ve kept this lily going, first on chalk, then limestone, for 50 years. It’s easy to increase from black bulbils which occur where the leaves join the stems. They come up everywhere, including in pots devoted to more exotic plants! Height 90–150cm. It clumps up, does well in shade but is finer in sun. My favourite.

**1 August**

**L. henryi** is a very healthy, long-lived lily, which builds up into huge clumps. Height 180–210cm.

It doesn’t mind a certain amount of shade, but tends to grow towards the sun and bend over smaller neighbours. Not the most beautiful, but possibly the easiest and most trouble free – and a parent of hybrids which should do well in calcareous soil.

**4 August**



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**Oriental hybrids\*** (based on *L. auratum*). These I grow in large pots or wooden tubs filled with John Innes ericaceous compost. I like these lilies, based on the open-flowered *L. auratum* from Japan. Their rich scent spreads round the garden. Here they have survived two icy spells in unprotected pots, but have not grown as high as usual – 90cm instead of 120 or even 150. They increase rather fast and need dividing and re-potting every three years. I would not be without them.

**15 August**



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*L. 'Black Beauty'* seems as easy to grow as its parent, *L. henryi*, but its other parent, *L. speciosum* var. *rubrum*, has endowed it with better looks. It is more erect than *L. henryi*, increases at only a modest rate, and grows 150–180cm tall.

**16 August**

**Patrick Bucknell** has been gardening since he was eight, wherever he has found himself, including at his naval quarters, in Hong Kong and on a Wimpole Street roof.