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Home > Advice > The forgotten stars of summer

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the forgotten stars of summer

Posted in All posts, July on 16th July 2015

My last month's blog was about flowers that are currently very much in vogue at the moment. So this month I thought I'd focus on those that deservedly should be but currently aren't.

I wrote last autumn about how I loved sultry varieties of lilies in the garden and that I was planting a number of them for our garden in Nottingham. Lilies seem to be off the in-vogue catwalk of garden plants at the moment and are firmly regarded as funeral flowers by many. Despite this, SarahRaven.com thankfully continues to supply varieties that really are must haves.



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At Chelsea this year however a beautifully deep and sultry lily was showcased by the plantswoman and garden designer Carien Van Boxtel in her Dutch Chocolate garden so I do hope that perhaps next year lilies will be given more of a spotlight than they currently are, quite often it just takes one action to create a trend!

Lilies create great drama and excitement and begin to bloom as soon as the alliums seed heads begin to turn brown. I advise you to go crazy with lilies! It really plays to buy a dozen of a single cultivar or several types which have similar flower colours. I plant them into deep pots as the part of the stem under the soil protrudes

roots so they like to be a good 5-10 inches deep in a gritty ericaceous compost.



Using this compost will ensure that the bulbs come back bigger and better each year. I feed our lilies each spring with a mix of chicken manure and potash.

Once the stems are growing well I stake each one firmly with hazel branch, and then all that you need to do is check the leaves once a week for lily beetles – these must be squished at all costs and it's this pest that makes a lot of people choose not to bother with lilies, but the effort is rewarded with the most exotic and flamboyant display (find more info about [how to plant and grow lily bulbs](#) on the Sarah Raven website).

The lily 'Pink Flavour' I have totally fallen for. The flower stems of which each Caribbean sunset flower is carried upon are a good few inches long so you can pick them for single stem vases while still having them in the garden.



Another diva bulb is the foxtail lily – the Eremurus. These great spires of excitement are expensive and in all honesty picky. They adorn Sarah Ravens bold and brilliant garden books first few pages as she used to have them in what is now the rose garden at Perch Hill. Here they look stunning planted with the peacock blue *Anchusa 'Loddon Royalist'* – a far more independent consort!



Foxtail lilies need incredibly good drainage and sun, but they don't like to be totally bone dry. Quite often they simply fail to return the following year due to the damp of a British winter as their native habitat is that of an almost desert terrain of central Asia. They appear from the earth almost looking like a small clump of red hot poker and once they begin to bloom will look good in the garden for about 3 weeks.



I bought 2 rather lifeless looking octopus bulbs of my favourite Eremurus cultivar ' Cleopatra' last year and duly set them into pots of compost mixed with a great amount of grit. The effort has been rewarded this spring with 2 spires of golden, apricot ruffled orange fireworks. I only wish I had a whole avenue of them!

Happy gardening!



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