

THE BLACKBERRY-LILY – A GREAT PERENNIAL

One flowering perennial plant that does well in our area is the blackberry-lily. Often called leopard-lily because of the spotted flowers, the blackberry-lily is really named after the mature inedible fruit that is shaped like a blackberry. A member of the Iris family, the blackberry-lily is a colorful and durable perennial that needs to be planted in more of our local landscapes.

If you have never seen a blackberry-lily, the following description will help you appreciate this plant. Growing at least two feet tall, the leaves are like those of an iris. During our warmer months, the flowers bloom vigorously, lasting only a day or two, but are followed by a constant supply of new blooms. The two-inch flowers are bright orange-yellow in color with reddish spots. A fruit then develops in the form of a three-chambered capsule that opens when ripe to reveal a set of clustered black seeds looking just like a blackberry. This long-lasting seed cluster is often even used in dried flower arrangements.

While in the northern parts of Florida blackberry-lilies perform as a short-lived perennial, in our area they are evergreen and bloom throughout the year. In the landscape, use blackberry-lilies as a

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www.wikipedia.org

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groundcover, along a walkway or in mass planting as a focal accent. In a mass planting, set individual plants about three feet apart for best coverage. While blackberry-lilies like full sun, these perennials have the ability to still flower abundantly even in partial shade. One source even indicates that they do best in light to moderate shade in our climate. In fact, leaf scorch can occur during the summer in full sun, so keep this in mind when picking a planting site. Plant these lilies in a well-drained site with plenty of organic matter. Well-drained soil is a must as crown rots can develop in wet soils. Blackberry-lilies are drought-tolerant once they are established and I have read of one planting that has done well for eight straight years.

Blackberry-lilies can get crowded as they develop into larger clumps and will benefit from division from time to time – every third or fourth year – to encourage top flower production. Seeds can also be germinated to produce more plants.

There are other blackberry-lily relatives sometimes available including the dwarf blackberry-lily and candy-lilies. The dwarf blackberry-lily only grows about 12 inches tall and has yellow flowers occasionally spotted with orange. Candy-lilies are hybrids that produce spotted or streaked flowers in many different colors including red, orange, blue, purple, pink and yellow in single and bicolor cultivars. They are much more colorful than the other blackberry-lily relatives and are worth growing.

Where can you find these perennials? Check at local garden centers or check mail-order Internet sources. If you don't see them locally, ask to see if a garden center will order them. If you like perennials, blackberry-lilies are a good selection!

Resources:

- Garofalo, J. (2002) *Blackberry-lily, A Flowering Perennial for South Florida*. Miami-Dade County UF/IFAS Extension Service.
- Gilman, E.F. (1999) *Belamcanda chinensis*. UF/IFAS Extension Service.

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