

# Green Thumb: Toad lilies attractive despite name

Christine Arpe Gang, Special to The Commercial Appeal 1:05 p.m. CDT October 28, 2016



(Photo: Julie Morgan)

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If someone had named them forest orchids or woody lilies instead of toad lilies, perhaps more of us would be growing them.

“Sometimes they name plants very strangely,” said Julie Morgan, whose Germantown garden is home to about a half dozen kinds.

Indeed they do, because there is nothing at all toad-like about these perennials that wait until late summer or fall to show us their beautiful flowers. White, purple and yellow are common petal colors. Many are speckled.

“They’re all rather small and delicate looking,” Morgan said, adding they enjoy the same light conditions as azaleas – some bright light but protected from hot full sun. Moist soil with lots of organic material keeps them happy, too.

Morgan had some trees removed this year and found the toad lilies bloomed even better in the brighter but still shady place in her garden.

Hers are planted among hostas, which protect them from the deer that often come to munch in her garden.

“The deer get full on the hostas and let the toad lilies alone,” Morgan said. The hosta foliage takes a big hit from the deer but usually survives.

You probably won't find toad lilies among the plants for sale at home improvement warehouses or other mass merchandisers. Morgan occasionally finds them at the Garden Fair spring plant sale at Dixon Gallery and Gardens and at some locally owned nurseries.



The vividly colored flowers of Amethyst toad lily are small but eye-catching. (Photo: Julie Morgan)

But her main source has been Plant Delights, the online nursery owned by Tony Avent, a premier plantsman who lives and works in Raleigh, North Carolina. When her daughter lived in that area, Morgan got to select her plants at the nursery.

Avent must also like toad lilies a lot because he writes extensively on them at [plantdelights.com/article/tricyrtis-toad-lily](https://plantdelights.com/article/tricyrtis-toad-lily).



The speckled flowers of Miyazaki toad lilies line up along the central stem of its leaves. (Photo: Julie Morgan)

A few from her collection are these:

- Imperial Banner has glossy green and white leaves and light lavender flowers with dark purple spots.
- Amethyst, one of her favorites, has white flowers tipped and dotted in vivid amethyst or blue hues.
- Miyazaki is unusual in the way its profuse purple and white spotted flowers that bloom in the leaf axils.

Toad lilies are easy to grow and make lovely companions for many of our favorite shade plants such as ferns astilbes, helleborus, heucheras and hostas. Give them a spot near the front of the border so their delicate flowers can be fully appreciated.

## Time to think daffodils

Planning ahead is a necessity if you want to enjoy daffodils in your garden next spring because now is the time to buy and plant their bulbs. .

Members of the Mid-South Daffodil Society are making it easy to purchase bulbs that are not only well adapted to our growing conditions but might just win a ribbon or two at next year's daffodil show.

About 5,000 daffodil bulbs representing about 50 varieties will be sold from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday in the potting hub at the Dixon Gallery and Gardens, 4339 Park.

A few are familiar varieties like Tete-a-Tete, a charming early blooming miniature that deserves its wide popularity; Thalia, a pure white daffodil with two to three flowers per stem and Salome, which has white petals and a cup that opens peachy yellow and matures to soft salmon.

But many more are probably new to the average gardener even if not to those who grow and show lots of daffodils.

June Davidson, a past president of the daffodil society, thinks three award-winning varieties are worthy of the attention of any gardener.

- Geranium is the 2016 winner of the American Daffodil Society's Gertrude Wister Award for being an outstanding performer in the garden. Not only does this heirloom have creamy white petals and a bright orange cup, it is also fragrant.
- Delnashaugh is another scented daffodil with double flower featuring apricot-pink center segments surrounded by large white petals. It won an award of "garden merit" from the Royal Horticultural Society.
- Red Devon, winner of several daffodil society awards, has bright yellow petals and flashy orange cup that can be seen from far away.

I would also recommend buying a few Rijnvelds Early Sensations. These modest daffodils will pop out of the cold soil in January or early February telling us that spring is definitely on the way.

Daffodils are not fussy when it comes to planting but following a few tips can make life easier for a gardener.

Davidson's method provides so much room for the bulbs to grow and multiply they won't have to be lifted and divided for 10 to 15 years instead of 5 to 7. (Lifting and dividing is done when flowers become sparse because the clump is too crowded.)

He digs a hole at least two times deeper than the height of the bulb and about 12 to 15 inches in diameter. The bulbs are placed in a circle around the outer edge.

"This allows them to expand inside and outside of the hole," Davidson said. "

He throws a handful of sand in the bottom of the hole the way his father did and adds a sprinkling of 0-20-0 fertilizer.

"The bulbs have everything they need to give you good flowers the first year but they need a little help in the second and third years before they become really established," Davidson said. The fertilizer does just that.

Daffodils can live indefinitely with very little maintenance. About the only thing that kills them is poorly drained soil that causes the bulbs to rot.

Daffodils are sometimes called cemetery ladies because they will bloom for years and years with no care at all.

Molly Hampton, a founding member of the daffodil society, said: "We want everyone to have some daffodils in their garden so they can feel the joy of seeing them in the spring."