

Liliaceae

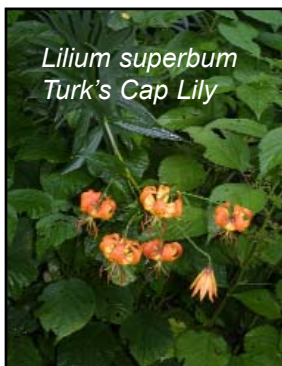
A couple of decades ago, there were about 28 different genera of plants included in the Lily family, native in the Southern Appalachians.



The Lily family was once "larger" than it is today. Recent taxonomic revisions have split the family apart into several new families, but this is common in scientific classification systems. It does not change the species names. A couple of decades ago, there were about 28 different genera of plants included in the Lily family, native in the Southern Appalachians. They included not only the lilies, but plants like Trilliums, Solomon's-seal, Bellworts, Trout lilies, Cucumber-root, Bead-lily, Fly-poison, False-Hellebore, Asparagus, Onion, Yucca, and Greenbriars. Today, there are only about 5 generic members in the Lily family, native to the mountains.

The true lilies are in the genus *Lilium*, and there are 5 species that are native in the Southern Appalachians. All grow from bulbs or underground stems called rhizomes, have yellow, orange, or red flowers with petals and sepals in multiples of 3, and capsular fruits filled with rows of winged seed. Some 'lilies' that are not true lilies- i.e. not in the *Lilium* genus, are Trout-lily (*Erythronium*), and Bead-lily (*Clintonia*); these will be discussed in some other time. Worldwide, there are about 110 species of *Lilium*.

Lilies can be grown by planting bulbs (usually in autumn), or by seed. The seed can be collected when slightly green and planted in fall for a spring germination, but if allowed to dry the seed can enter into a dormancy which requires 60 days of alternating warm/cool/warm soil periods before they germinate. The emerging shoots in spring are easily damaged by animals or breakage, which will prevent further growth for that year.



***Lilium superbum*, Turk's Cap Lily** The most common and conspicuous lily in the mountains is the Turk's Cap Lily (*Lilium superbum*). It can grow to 10 ft. tall, with 3 to 60 flowers atop a rigid stem adorned with whorls of leaves. Each leaf is widest at its middle, tapering to a narrow point. The orange or reddish flowers have spots, and the petals curl backwards after opening in July to August. A green wedge of color occurs at the base of each petal, giving a starlike appearance when one looks directly into the flower. This lily grows in moist soils at many elevations. Cherokee Indians found the bulb to be quite useful as food, it being starchy and rather sweetish to the taste (after cooking). Flour was made from these bulbs, and boiled bulbs were good to "fatten-up" children- we can use potatoes for this purpose, today. Turk's Cap Lily can hybridize with *Lilium canadense*, but it is not the same as the "Tiger Lily" often seen in cultivation. That is an Asian species (*Lilium lancifolium*)- it produces dark bulblets in the leaf axils along the stem, something not seen in native lilies.

***Lilium canadense*, Canada Lily** Another tall native lily is the Canada Lily (*Lilium canadense*), usually about 4 to 6 ft. It is similar in general appearance to the Turk's Cap, but the flower petals spread outward without curling back. This lily is sometimes seen in high mountain balds and sunny, boggy soils of high elevations, but it is rare. Blooms appear mostly in June or July. Its bulbs were likewise used as a starchy food source by the Indians of the region.

Lilium canadense, Canada Lily





Lilium michauxii, Michaux's Lily or Carolina Lily is usually a much shorter lily than the preceding two, often 1 to 3 ft. in height. It can be taller in moist places. It bears up to 6 flowers, the petals curved or curling back as in the Turk's Cap Lily. The leaves are distinct in their shape- broadest near the tip and rather blunt. The leaves also can be whorled on the middle part of the stem, but alternate above or below. This lily blooms in July-August, seen mostly in oak-pine woods of middle and lower elevations. It spreads using underground rhizomes.



Lilium grayi, Gray's Lily or Roan Lily is a rare and beautiful lily of high elevation balds, mostly in NC and VA, and one county in TN. It was originally discovered on Roan Mtn. It resembles the Canada Lily, but the flower petals are straight, not spreading outward, and taper abruptly to a short, blunt tip. The bell-shaped, deep red flowers have purplish spots, and are thought to be pollinated by hummingbirds. This lily prefers open sun in high mountains, suffering from fungal diseases sometimes if cultivated at lower places. The leaves are widest near the middle, which will help distinguish it from Carolina Lily. Blooms June-July.



Lilium philadelphicum, The Wood Lily is another rare lily of the Southern Appalachians, but is much more common northward. It rides the high mountains south to NC, favoring the balds. The flowers are very distinct, being held upright, not drooping as in our other native lilies. The petals have a narrow 'waist' that is often referred to as being "clawed" in botanical descriptions. Flowers appear in June-July. Farther north, this lily grows in rather dry woods. The bulbs have been used as food, but unlike Turk's Cap or Canada Lily, the taste has been described as peppery and strong, or sometimes bitter.