

Lilies Adapted to Growing on Heavy Soils

By Barbara Adams-Eichendorf

My garden is 50 kilometres north of Saskatoon in the village of Hepburn. I've been growing lilies for about fifteen years. Over the years I've observed that there is noticeable difference in the length of my growing season compared to that of Saskatoon, Hepburn often has its first snowfall of the winter a week or more before Saskatoon experiences snow. In spring my yard is about a week to ten days slower to awaken than yards in Saskatoon. I'm sure that part of this difference is due to the heat island created by the city. My soil conditions are also not ideal for lilies. My garden soil is fairly heavy silty clay loam, which doesn't provide the good drainage, which almost all lilies require. I've grown several hundred different lily cultivars, which are much more tolerant of heavier soils and drainage, which is, less than perfect. The following are a few cultivars, which have flourished in the less than ideal cultural conditions, which a year may offer.

One of the earliest cultivars to bloom in my yard is 'Jolly Miller'. This is an upfacing apricot coloured lily with large flowers, showing a sprinkling of black spots towards the centre of the petals. This lily grows to about 18 inches tall in my yard. I've observed that on heavier soils, lilies (and other crops such as carrots) generally grow shorter or smaller than in lighter, sandier soil. The petals of 'Jolly Miller' have a very good substance and when this lily is in bloom it is lovely. Shades of orange are not my favourite colours, but I can forgive this lily its orangeness because it blooms early and after a long winter I'm starved for the sight of a lily blossom.

'Marlene' is a more recent introduction, which has been a pleasant surprise for me. This is an upfacing cultivar, which grows to about 36 inches in my yard. The large flat flowers are white with pink tips, and appear mid season. I planted this lily in a bed which had clay subsoil mixed into it when trenching was done for a waterline. In the space of about 5 years 'Marlene' has formed a large healthy

clump in much less than ideal conditions. When I planted the bed, I added a lot of peat moss to improve the tilth of the soil, but there is such high clay content that organic matter should be added yearly. 'Marlene' hasn't noticed yet that I've been negligent in my duties.

An old favorite, and a late season bloomer, which is outstanding, in my yard is 'Joanna'. This is a tall lily with a nicely shaped inflorescence, held upright on sturdy stems. Flower colour is rich yellow with an orangish flame in each petal. I planted this lily in the same bed as 'Marlene' and both have performed very well in that location.

When the cultivar 'Tiger Babies' became available, I bought a bulb because I found the flowers very attractive. However, in my soil and climatic conditions this lily has not performed very well. It has not been as vigorous as I had hoped. I planted a bulb of 'Katinka' a couple of years after planting 'Tiger Babies' and have found 'Katinka' to be far superior in my garden. These lilies are quite similar to each other in colour and the flowers on both are down facing. Flower colour is a pale peachy-buff with a generous sprinkling of chocolate spots. In my garden 'Katinka' grows about 40 inches and blooms mid-season.

I am partial to bi-colour and brush marked lilies, and to lilies, which are unusual. 'Lativa Promise' fits the description for unusual. The flowers are pale yellow with the inner third to half of the petals heavily, densely marked with a 'speckles' pattern in dark reddish-brown. This is a strong, healthy lily, which I've had in my garden for about 4 years. It blooms in mid season with up-facing flowers and reaches a height of about 30 inches.

I have grown all of these lily cultivars for at least four years and have found all of them to be outstanding performers in my garden. I would recommend them to gardeners who enjoy growing lilies and especially for gardeners, who, like me face the challenge of providing drainage in heavy soil. (Reprinted from the Canadian Prairie Lily Society Newsletter, December 2000)

