

Martagon Lilies - by Allan Daku and Margaret Driver, CPLS Newsletter #84:3-4

Martagon lilies are thick-textured lilies that thrive under most prairie conditions but are not commonly encountered. They will grow from 1 meter to 1.5 meters high and produce a narrow pyramidal flower spike which may consist of 20 or more small pendulous flowers.

The flower buds, prior to opening, are covered with many white hairs and after opening the flowers which may be from 3 to 5 cm across, develop highly recurved tepals (petals and sepals) forming a "turk's cap". Species or cultivars with deep red or white coloured tepals are common, but there are also brown, pink, light lavender, orange, tan, cream and yellow colours now available in the trade. Under normal growing conditions flowering occurs in mid June to early July.

When viewing the types of the leaves on the various lilies grown in Prairie Canada, those of Martagon lilies can be considered as fairly unique. Leaves at the top of the stem tend to be randomly arranged, whereas there may be one or more whorls of leaves (three or more leaves attached in a circle around the stem) spaced along the stem.

With the exception of *L. hansonii*, martagon species and hybrids have an erect concentric bulb with jointed bulb scales.

The seed of the martagon is heavy and germination is hypogeal delayed (that is, a very small bulb forms first then a leaf appears). The seed is sown and held at 20 C, after 12-14 weeks a tiny bulb forms underground; the seed tray is then chilled at 4- 6 C, at about 6 weeks a small leaf should appear.

There are five species in the Martagon group: *L. martagon*, *L. hansonii*, *L. medeoloides*, *L. distichum*, and *L. tsingtauense*. They are native to certain areas in Europe and Asia. *L. martagon* has been grown in European gardens since the late sixteenth century. The modern day martagon hybrids are bred primarily from *L. martagon* and *L. hansonii*.

The martagon is often described as a "permanent" lily in the garden, that is, it prefers to remain where it is planted and does not take kindly to frequent transplanting. If moved, the martagon may "sulk", that is, it may fail to make an appearance the following spring. However do not despair there is activity going on underground. The martagon after transplanting often expends its energy in the formation of new roots rather than above ground growth. Once established the martagon flourishes and becomes an "automatic" in your garden. The planting site: a.) should be dug thoroughly to a depth of 10 inches incorporating some fertilizer and humus; b.) good drainage is essential, the martagon is tolerant but resent "wet" feet; c.) martagons can be located in light shade, woodland sites, in open sunny areas, or between shrubs; and .d) martagons should have some shelter from prevailing winds to prevent the stem from being battered. If planted along with shrubs the shrubs will require some pruning to prevent them from smothering the lilies. Martagons will tolerate heavy clay soils especially if the watering is reduced after the rapid growing phase.

Martagons seem to be very resistant to disease, Michael Jefferson-Brown states that martagons are virtually impervious to virus attack. He also describes martagons as lilies for the beginner, faint-hearted and desperately busy!

Martagons do have a few drawbacks - some need a "settling in period" and they do have a slower rate of reproducing bulbs. The slow reproduction is the reason for the scarcity and higher cost of the bulbs. However the drawbacks are not great enough to prevent anyone from growing this some interesting lily!

References

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