

## *Gloriosa superba* L.

## Climbing Lily

(*Clinostylis speciosa*, *Eugone superba*, *Gloriosa abyssinica*, *Gloriosa angulata*, *Gloriosa caerulea*, *Gloriosa cirrhifolia*, *Gloriosa doniana*, *Gloriosa graminifolia* var. *heterphylla*, *Gloriosa grandiflora*, *Gloriosa grandiflora*, *Gloriosa homblei*, *Gloriosa leopoldii*, *Gloriosa lutea*, *Gloriosa nepalensis*, *Gloriosa plantii*, *Gloriosa rockefelliana*, *Gloriosa rothschildiana*, *Gloriosa sampiana*, *Gloriosa simplex*, *Gloriosa speciosa*, *Gloriosa verschuurii*, *Gloriosa virescens*, *Methonica abyssinica*, *Methonica doniana*, *Methonica gloriosa*, *Methonica grandiflora*, *Methonica leopoldii*, *Methonica petersiana*, *Methonica plantii*, *Methonica platyphylla*, *Methonica superba*, *Methonica virescens*)

**Other Common Names:** Creeping Lily, Flame Lily, Gloriosa Lily, Glory Lily, Glory Vine, Malabar Glory Pipa de Turco, Superb Lily, Tiger Claws, Vine Lily.

**Family:** Placed by some authorities in the more inclusive Liliaceae, by others in the more narrowly defined Colchicaceae DC. nom. cons.

**Cold Hardiness:** *Gloriosa superba* is root hardy in USDA zones 9 (8) to 13, but stems are killed to the ground in regions where frost occurs.

**Foliage:** Leaves are evergreen or dieback in response to drought in tropical climates, but dieback due to cold in much of our region; no fall color develops in areas where the stems are nipped back by frost; alternate, or sometimes opposite or even whorled, simple, 5" to 7" long ovate-lanceolate to narrowly lanceolate blades terminate in extremely elongated acuminate tips which recurve to coil around objects for anchorage during climbing (cirrhose); the bright to rich green sessile leaves have cuneate bases, more or less parallel venation with entire to undulate margins, an extended midrib, and are glabrous with a nearly rubbery texture.

**Flower:** Open flowers roughly resemble a pendent red and yellow to yellow-green tiger lily flower on a vine, whereas the flower buds resemble light green nodding green jalapeno peppers; the monocious flowers have six reflexed tepals which are 2" to 3" long and varying in color from mostly scarlet red, orange-red to yellow-green, most tepals are a combination of red on terminal regions and yellow on distal portions; tepal margins are distinctly undulate; six yellow-green to yellow stamens with long recurving filaments are present; flowers occur whenever conditions permit during the growing season, for our region from late spring to frost; individual flowers last for an extended time, thus making serviceable cut flowers.

**Fruit:** Fruit are infrequently seen in our region, but consist of three chambered capsules resembling three gnarled greenbean pods bound together into a three chambered tube; these dehiscent capsules are 2" to 3" long, maturing from a dark green to a black-brown at maturity when they peel apart to reveal bright to dark red globose seeds.

**Stem / Bark:** Stems —stems are stiff, bright green to yellow-green, almost succulent and glabrous; Buds — the light yellow-green very tiny buds are foliose and essentially embedded within the stem; Bark — not applicable in our region as this plant functions as a herbaceous perennial or annual; even in the tropics this vine tends to dieback and go dormant occasionally, sometimes associated with dry seasons.

**Habit:** This interesting vine climbs by clasping small diameter items with its curling elongated leaf tips; plants are strongly erect and sparsely branched, sprouting from thickened whitish underground tuberous stems; overall textures are medium to medium-coarse; in areas where the stems dieback to the ground, vines are typically not more than 6' to 10' tall, but they can sometimes become larger in tropical climates.

**Cultural Requirements:** Plants are rather surprisingly easy to grow, most any good garden soil with reasonable good drainage, good fertility and moderately constant moisture supplies will work; provide a sunny to mostly sunny location and a suitable structure for climbing, but avoid reflected heat from south facing walls in summer in southern portions of our region; avoid windy exposures; remove winter damaged tissues prior to renewed growth in spring where the soil does not freeze, otherwise lift the dormant tubers in fall or overwinter in containers indoors; reports on Climbing Lily's level of salinity tolerance is variable; chlorosis is common on poor fertility sites.

**Pathological Problems:** Dry conditions during the dormant season reduce chances of root rots; aphids are an occasional problem on new growth.

**Ornamental Assets:** Beautiful striking long lasting lily-like flowers over an extended season are the primary asset, while the unusual climbing method adds a bit of spice for plant aficionados.

**Limitations & Liabilities:** Stems tend to be a bit on the brittle side and can be easily broken, vines do not handle

lots of mechanical abuse and thus are usually sold as dormant tuberous rhizomes, limiting use in commercial settings; plants are rather slow to flower from seed; poor fertility soils may result in chlorotic foliage.

**Landscape Utilization:** Where this can be grown on trellises or other small structures which the delicate leaf tips can grasp, it makes an intriguing conversation piece for patios or along pedestrian paths; the foliage is seldom dense enough to serve as a particularly effective screening material; tall tepee type trellises with cross bracing make good places for the vine to sort of sprawl up until the leaves anchor it; Climbing Lily is sometimes grown in hanging baskets and is may be harvested for the cut flower industry.

**Other Comments:** Climbing Lily is a botanical curiosity with good accent potential; the genus name from Latin means full of glory while the specific epithet honors the British zoologist and banker Lionel Walter, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Rothschild; at least twice, authorities tried to name this species after wealthy families, i.e. *Gloriosa rockefelliana* and *Gloriosa rothschildiana*, a common practice at times used to please potential wealthy sponsors; caution is advised in growing *G. superba* around children and grazing livestock as it is reported to be **poisonous**, containing the chemical colchicine; contact with the tubers may cause a skin rash in some people.

**Native Habitat:** An African, South Asia, and Southeast Asian native, *G. superba* has naturalized in several other tropical and subtropical locations around the world.

**Related Taxa:** *Glorosia* L. is a monotypic genus containing a single variable species which was once treated as several different species; 'Rothschildiana' is the most commonly encountered taxon in the nursery trade with somewhat larger flowers than the species type with red petals rimmed with yellow; it is thought to be a tetraploid; 'Simplex' has smaller flowers that are more orange and yellow in color.

**References:** Dehgan, 1998; Holttum and Enoch, 2002; Llamas, 2003.