Rain Lily
Zephyranthes

General Information
Scientific name: Zephyranthes spp.
Pronunciation: zeff-fer-RANTH-eez species
Common name(s): Rain-Lily
Family: Amaryllidaceae
Plant type: bulb/tuber; herbaceous
Planting month for zone 9: year round
Origin: native to Florida
Uses: naturalizing; edging
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

Description
Height: .5 to 1 feet
Spread: .5 to 1 feet
Plant habit: upright
Plant density: open
Growth rate: slow
Texture: fine

This group of charming bulbs, also known as pink fairy lilies, Zephyr lilies, and rain lilies are originally from Mexico, Guatemala and the grassy plains of South America. In the wild, flowers bloom after a rain. Incredibly climatically diverse, they can be found wild in tropical lowlands, rain forests, and arid deserts. There are rain lilies for every climatic zone that does not experience long periods of freezing weather. They seem to be quite happy under domestication, and can be planted year round in North Florida.

Rain lilies thrive in conditions not favorable for true garden lilies. They produce lush clumps of foliage in the fall when the weather is cool and can be mistaken during the winter for liriope. Spectacular effects can be achieved when used in mass plantings. These bulbs prefer to be left alone which is handy for the gardener! It is ideal to allow large clumps to develop and you will be rewarded with spectacular results. Rain lilies are wonderful in pots, nooks and crannies or as a garden edge.

Fertilize bulbs in the ground with an annual addition of compost or a blend of compost and mulch during the growing season. Rain lilies thrive on regular summer watering. If you want to divide them, do it in the fall right after flowering. These hardy, resilient plants should be ready to flower by the next summer.

If you buy them mail order, which is the only way to get most of them, plant the bulbs immediately; they resent being dry for extended periods of time.
Rain lilies are very well suited for containers on a patio. Plant 2 sets in a 2-gallon container and keep them in a partially shaded location during the hottest time of the year. Even while dormant, it is advisable to water the containers occasionally; just be sure that there is good drainage. After they flower, they will set copious amounts of seed which will ripen in about 4 weeks. Just shake these back in the pot and keep moist. In about 2 years you will have 60 or more mature bulbs blooming all at once after each rain shower.

The large, pink flowering Zephyranthes grandiflora has been in cultivation for decades and is the only rain lily that can claim to be common. Some strains have flowers more than 3 inches long and range in color from a delicate pale pink to a deep rose.

The white-flowering rain lily is Zephyranthes candida. This is an evergreen species with rounded, rushlike leaves in a dense clump. The open, pearly white flowers begin in late summer and continue through the fall. Like most rain lilies, the longer it remains in place the larger and more impressive it becomes.

The yellow rain lily is known as Zephyranthes citrina. The clear yellow flowers are about 1 inch long and emerge in the late summer amid the dark-green leaves. This species is deciduous and does not spread as quickly as the other two.

Zephyranthes X ‘Prairie Sunset’ is a hybrid of Zephyranthes x 'Capricorn' and Zephyranthes candida. In August, it blooms with pale-apricot flowers that fade to pale pink.

Each species has a different time schedule for flowering, reaching a peak in July and August. With careful selection of at least six species you can have orange, pink, yellow, white, rose, or red rain lilies flowering for nine months of the year from mid-March until mid-November.