

PLANT PROFILE

***HAEMANTHUS COCCINEUS* OR BLOOD LILY**

The spectacular Blood Lily or *Haemanthus coccineus* (derived from the Greek word Haima, meaning blood, anthos meaning flower, coccineus is Latin for red) burst forth in March/April with an unusual flower that looks like a big shaving brush. The leaves then follow and they alone are worth growing. The oversize, tongue-shaped leaves can reach 50 centimetres long and 15 centimetres wide. If you can find anyone willing to part with a bulb, much the better, as on line they appear to be around A\$30 each.

They grow easily in the sun or shade. I have a very healthy plant in full shade and two more in pots in the sun, also performing well.

Haemanthus albifloss (white flower with smaller slightly hairy leaves) seems happier in the shaded areas of my garden. I read that the Blood Lily likes well-drained, not too fertile soil, periods of sunshine once the foliage dies down, infrequent disturbance and a liking to be crowded. *Haemanthus* is an excellent bulb for a large container. Plant with the bulb just below the surface. I fertilize mine as the leaves are dying down, as you do with any bulbs. You may have to wait a year or two for the first flowers to appear, but your patience will be rewarded at the first sight of a small red lip peeping up unexpectedly!

The Blood Lily was first collected on Table Mountain in South Africa in 1605. The bulb is said to be poisonous but has been used in Africa for the treatment of headaches.

I can't recommend it highly enough!



Text and photographs: Maggie Leggott