



September 1, 2020

Contributed by Lin Moeller

BLACKBERRY LILY!

Blackberry Lily, *Belameanda chinensis*, has been an interesting, easy to grow fixture in my perennial gardens for over thirty years. My discovery of it came during a trip to Thomas Jefferson's Monticello where it was first planted in 1807 in one of the oval gardens. From a conservation, native plant viewpoint, it is perfect for our gardens as it grows wild in central Virginia. Though some sources say, "Not so fast! It is an alien from E. Asia!" Regardless, it is a very interesting summer perennial.



Although called a lily, it is actually a member of the Iris family with a fan of sword like leaves. As shown in the photo, the flowers are 1½ - 2 inches across, six petaled, yellow/orange with purplish red specks. Each flower lasts one day after which the petals twist tightly together.



Eventually it forms a seed capsule which weeks later splits open to reveal black seeds resembling a blackberry, from which its name is derived. It is easily propagated by seed in a loamy, well-drained soil and in partial to full sun or transplanted as a seedling. Like many irises, it doesn't always bloom the first year.

It is also found in medicinal plant and herb guides where the roots are used in remedies for lowering blood pressure to anti-fungal, bacterial and viral solutions.

It is definitely an unusual conversation piece, for guests always seem to ask what it is when visiting the garden. I have seeds and seedlings for any who are interested...