

# The Augusta Chronicle

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## COLUMNS

# Campbell Vaughn: 'Naked ladies' finally popped up out of the ground

**Campbell Vaughn** Columnist

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I rode up to the office early Monday and there were naked ladies in the front yard. Susie and I just said last week we wondered if they were coming this year because others had seen them around town, but not us on Greene Street.

They have been consistent about showing up in September for as long as I can remember, and they finally just popped up. They popped up out of the ground because naked ladies are flowers. Get your minds out of the gutter people.

These plants you assumed were perverts roaming around downtown Augusta are called red spider lilies (*Lycoris radiata*) which are a late summer/early fall blooming bulb of the amaryllis family. The name spider lily comes from the fact the filaments (a part of the male pollen bearing flower structure) grow longer than the petals which give it a tarantula effect or maybe reminiscent of daddy-long-leg spider. They are also called naked ladies because they come up as stalks with no leaves at all. Just a flower head. I had one randomly pop up in a flowerbed in my yard this past week. What a treat.

One of the traits of the red spider lily is one day there will be nothing abnormal in the lawn or shrub bed and the next day there will be a group of stalks with a bud on the top. A couple of days later the bud opens and there is some type of red alien flower on a leafless stalk. At our office on Greene Street, we have a batch that goes from hidden under the grass to full bloom in about a week.

The red spider lily is from Asia from the amaryllis family. The genus name, *Lycoris*, refers to a Roman mistress who has links of possibly being naked in the presence of Brutus, Marcus Antonius and the poet Cornelius Gallus. The red spider lily is common on edges of fields in Japan but was imported from China most likely during the 700s AD during the T'ang dynasty. I have a big appreciation for the way the Japanese highlight changes in season with

plants. The cherry blossom shows spring while the red spider lily is a symbol of fall. I hope the Japanese got this one right, because I am ready for fall with a 97-degree day this week.

**Campbell Vaughn:** Is your lawn ready for fall? Try these five tips to keep it looking good.

With a hardiness zone from 5b-10, these bulbs grow best in rich, medium moisture, well-drained soils in full sun to part shade. After the red spider flowers fade, the leaves emerge from the ground not too long after and are evergreen during the winter and die when we hit some hot weather in late spring. Make sure to keep the leaves on the lilies throughout the winter season so the bulb can get sunlight to feed the plant.

If you want to share the bulbs, divide them in the spring when the leaf foliage turns yellow. A lot of plant retailers will keep them in stock during the season, but they tend to sell out quickly. I have seen them in the Georgia Department of Agriculture's Market Bulletin on occasion.

These crazy red flowers never cease to amaze me. Enjoy them now because they don't last long.