

COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Ginger lilies require some room to grow, but are a sweet-smelling joy

Campbell Vaughn Augusta Chronicle

Oct. 3, 2025, 4:01 a.m. ET

Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

Ginger lilies are fragrant, tropical-looking plants that bloom in late summer and early fall.

They thrive in rich, well-drained soil with morning sun and afternoon shade.

These plants grow from spreading rhizomes and will die back in the winter before returning in the spring.

Now that my neighborhood pool is closed for the season, I have switched into fall and winter mode around the house. It is time to start doing projects in the woodshop, cleaning out the garage and getting ready for outdoor fires.

While not taking a dip in the pool yesterday afternoon, I piddled around in the yard and caught a whiff of a plant that smelled fantastic. I talked about tea olives blooming their sweet fragrance a few weeks ago, but this was different. When I came around the corner, my ginger lilies (*Hedychium coronarium*) were exploding with gigantic headlike flowers, and the fragrance was at the next level.

Ginger lilies are tall, tropical-looking plants that aren't true lilies. They've been filling Georgia landscapes for generations with their bold leaves and perfume-filled flowers.

What is unique about these flowers is that when many other summer bloomers fizzle out in the heat, ginger lilies seem to thrive with the late summer humidity.

And how lucky am I that it is the first of October and I am getting to experience them the same time my yard is starting to get littered with fall leaves?

Ginger lilies do well throughout most of the state, but probably need a little extra protection in the north. They tend to do well with morning sun and afternoon shade, especially in hotter parts of Georgia. Like a lot of our blooming plants, a little too much shade can produce handsome foliage, but fewer flowers, and direct southwest summer sun can scorch plants.

Looking for a free mini puzzle? [Play the USA TODAY Quick Cross now.](#)

Ginger lilies love rich, well-drained soil amended with plenty of organic material, but seem to do well in tougher soils as long as they don't stay wet.

Ginger lilies are a clumping plant growing from rhizomes. They grow 4-6 feet tall and do well in masses in the background like fences or in an area where the fragrance can drift to a patio. The leaves are large and a medium to pale green so they make a great contrast with plants that have dark leaves with medium to fine textures.

Ginger lilies will spread, so make sure to give them some room. They are also easy to split to share with friends if they overrun an area. One reason ginger lilies have become staples in older gardens is their toughness. Plant them once, making sure they aren't in standing water, and they'll come back indefinitely. They are herbaceous, meaning they will die all the way back to the ground when we have a good freeze. When the ground temperature warms in the spring, they will grow back into a larger mass than the year before due to the rhizomes expanding.

Most of the time, ginger lilies in Georgia are relatively trouble-free, but occasionally mites, scale or aphids can attack. Horticulture oil or insecticidal soaps can easily solve those pesky infestations. I have seen that these tall flowers tend to lodge, which is when a plant gets a little too tall and can't fully support the weight of the plant and falls over. Often, folks will gently tie them up to make sure they stay upright.

Campbell Vaughn: [Hurricane Helene could be the reason you're seeing more mushrooms](#)

Ginger lilies are also frequented by butterflies and hummingbirds, which is also a great trait for landscape lovers.

As a cut flower, the stems last well in vases and the fragrance is tough to match.

The most common color for the blooms on the ginger lily is bright white, but they do have cultivars that are yellow, peach, orange or cream.

Try adding a little tropical flare to your yard with a mass of ginger lilies for some tall, bold texture, late season fragrance that extends your summer landscape into the fall. I am loving having mine all the way into October.