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Rain Lilies

ZEPHYRANTHES
GRANDIFLORA

By Wan Noorli Razali



As the monsoon season approaches in Malaysia, be on the lookout for the vibrant display of Rain Lilies, scientifically referred to as *Zephyranthes rosea*. These funnel-shaped flowers emerge individually, standing tall above their tuft-like foliage and come in a variety of colors, including white, bright pink, yellow, and orange.

Zephyranthes, a genus encompassing around 70 species in the Amaryllidaceae family, is native to southern North America, Central America, and South America. Commonly known as rain flower, rain lily, and zephyr lily, these plants are used in mild climates as landscape features due to their appealing foliage and sizable flowers. However, they are also adaptable to pot cultivation. Each bulb produces a cluster of grass-like leaves.

The pink rain lily, a perennial with outward-spreading grassy foliage, grows from a tunicate bulb with reddish skin. Its long, narrow, strap-like green leaves, slightly glossy or shiny, may have a reddish base. The persistence or dieback of foliage depends on environmental conditions. In this region, the white rain lily is known to be easier to cultivate.

The funnel-shaped flowers, borne individually on erect hollow scapes, unfurl from tightly furled buds emerging from the bulbs. The stalks elongate 10-12 inches before the 4-inch-wide flowers open. Each flower boasts 6 petals, including 3 sepals and 3 identical petals, along with a long white style featuring a three-parted stigma that extends to one side and floppy, golden anthers. Flowers open flat at midday and close in the afternoon. While each bloom lasts only a few days, multiple flushes of blooms can occur throughout the

season, typically following soaking rain.

In their natural habitat, these flowers usually appear a few days after a substantial rainstorm following a dry period. In cultivation, they bloom without the need for cyclical droughts, but outdoor container plants seem to bloom more readily after thunderstorms. Cycles of drying and watering stimulate bulb blooming, although they will still bloom in bursts with consistent moisture throughout the year. Indoor cultivation allows for blooming at any time of the year.

To cultivate these bulbs, plant them outdoors in full sun and rich, organic soil. Place the bulb about an inch below the soil surface and 2-4 inches apart, or closer in containers, as they thrive when crowded. Planting them in groups or clusters enhances their effectiveness. While rain lilies tolerate dry conditions, regular watering and fertilization improve foliar growth and flowering.



References

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