

***Eucomis* (Pineapple Lilly)**

Genus - Asparagaceae subsp scilloideae - Native of South Africa

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Over 30 years ago I was given *Eucomis autumnalis* as a bulb. I shoved it in a pot of multipurpose compost and waited and waited and nothing happened, so I put it with my Hosta pots and forgot about it. In June it stirred, a green rosette of leaves appeared and then I forgot about it until one day, in early autumn, I saw this small creamy green pineapple (it wasn't a pineapple, it was the flowers in pineapple formation with a green topknot). It was lovely, just 8 inches high and perfectly formed. I felt it would not be hardy as it looked so fleshy and I meant to bring it in for the winter, but being busy I forgot until I was tidying my Hosta pots in the spring and found my *Eucomis* pot. "Oh shoot" I thought and kicked myself very hard as I had enjoyed this plant and didn't want to kill it. To my surprise when I carefully emptied the pot there were three nice firm bulbs, one of which I put into a pot and the rest in the garden.

As the years went by I remembered to bring my pot in and every year I put more into the garden; this scenario went on for many years, the ones in my garden doing just as well as the ones in pots, so finally I stopped bothering growing this one in pots. The ones in the garden were in slightly different conditions - in the front garden they were dry and had sun until noon and in the back garden a little moist and sun from noon onwards. They were equally good and survived every winter including November 2010.

In 2016 I decided to buy a few more *Eucomis* varieties as I noticed a friend's *Eucomis comosa* 'Sparkling Burgundy' had also survived the winter of 2010 in the ground (also semi shade and dryish). I now have 16 named varieties though as yet I've only planted three in the garden. On researching *Eucomis* I just get more confused as the naming and hardiness ratings are all conflicting and they would all disagree with the way I grow them in my garden. But hey! That's gardening for you. From what I can figure out *Eucomis autumnalis* (*undulata*) and all forms of *E. comosa* seem quite hardy and the dark leaved ones don't seem to lose their colour in part shade. *Eucomis vandermerwei* 'Octopus' is very tender and as for the rest I will try them in the garden when I have enough to do so.

If you like propagating, these really are good fun plants to own as they grow from seed like mustard and cress and will flowers in 5-6 years, but even more fun is to do leaf cuttings. For anyone who has never tried leaf cuttings its worth looking up how to do it and with what - it's an easy way of creating more plants and with *Eucomis* a one inch slice will produce one to three bulblets. It's really amazing to take a piece of leaf and get bulbs in only a few months.

Tender perennials were never my thing, but discovering they can be hardy is good to know even though books will say only hardy to -5°C, but obviously some will go down to at least -20°C. As a busy person my *Eucomis* in pots just come into the house and go under the table in the conservatory in their pots. But of course you could decant them and put them in paper bags for the winter. I only buy ones I like but I can't find *Eucomis humilis* featured in Philips and Rix 'Conservatory and Indoors - volume 2'. It may have changed its name but it's always worth trying to get something new.