

Cornell patents a pink lily look-alike that blooms all summer long

January 8 2008

Mauve Majesty is one cool lily look-alike. This new pinkish-purple ornamental flower, just patented by Cornell, can last for two weeks in a vase, but when left in the garden, it blooms all summer long in the cooler, northern states until the first hard freeze in the fall.

The new hybrid of the Inca lily (*Alstroemeria*), which was developed by a Cornell professor, is a non-fragrant perennial that is set apart by its lavender-lilac flower color (which is adorned with dark speckling and a creamy yellow throat), its strong, upright flower stems and its winter hardiness. In greenhouses, the new hybrid never goes dormant and grows year-round.

Developed by Mark Bridgen, Cornell professor of horticulture and director of the Department of Horticulture's Long Island Horticultural Research and Extension Center, the hybrid is the first ornamental plant patented by Cornell, according to Richard Cahoon, associate director of Patents and Technology at Cornell's Technology Transfer Office.

It is also one of the first in its color class to be hardy to zone 6 of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Plant Hardiness Zone Map (coasts of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York and northern New Jersey and much of the Midwest) and often to many parts of the cooler zone 5 (which includes western Massachusetts, mid-state New York, northern Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, much of Michigan, southern Iowa and Nebraska, northern Missouri and Kansas, and eastern Colorado).

"Alstroemeria flowers, native to South America, are the fifth most popular cut flower in the United States," said Bridgen, who was recently awarded the 2008 Herbert Medal from the International Bulb Society for meritorious achievement in advancing knowledge of bulbous plants. "The flowers can often be found in hotel lobbies and fancy restaurants because they don't wilt for up to two weeks."

The hybrid, which botanically is not a lily, took five years to develop, said Bridgen, which included testing it and growing in large enough quantities to sell. It is now widely available through nurseries and mail-order catalogs.

Source: Cornell University

Citation: Cornell patents a pink lily look-alike that blooms all summer long (2008, January 8) retrieved 4 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-01-cornell-patents-pink-lily-look-alike.html>

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