

Tale from the Garden!

Shocking pink is not generally a colour one associates with autumn, for this is the season of rich golds, oranges, and yellows, followed by umber, sienna, and faded browns. But pink? Check out the brilliant pink *Nerine Bowdenii*! *Nerine Bowdenii* is a floral firework — a welcome flash of colour as the temperature drops and the days get shorter. As November brings Bonfire Night & Firework displays, what better flower is there to represent this time of the year.



Most nerines are tender greenhouse bulbs, but *Nerine bowdenii* is the nearest to being hardy, and well worth planting outdoors in a warm sunny border backed by the shelter of a wall. They are the perfect bulb to add colour when the rest of the garden is winding down & are best planted in tight clumps for a dramatic, late season display. They work well in a mixed herbaceous border and make an excellent cut flower. They bear striking sprays of lily-like funnel-shaped flowers with recurved petals on erect leafless stems with strap-shaped or linear leaves appearing after the flowers.

The common names of this exotic, autumn-flowering bulb include Cornish lily, Guernsey lily, and Jersey lily. However, it is not a true lily. It is more closely related to the Amaryllis. Nor is it from Cornwall, Guernsey, or Jersey. For many years, it was thought that these lovely bulbs came from Japan, but their native home is, in fact, South Africa, especially the Drakensberg Mountains of Natal. The species was named in 1904, honouring Athelstan Hall Cornish-Bowden, an English Government land surveyor employed in South Africa, who sent bulbs of the plant home to his mother in England.

The genus name, *Nerine*, comes from the Nereids (sea-nymphs) of Greek mythology that protected sailors, their ships, and perhaps their cargo. The naming was based on the story of how the first of this South African plant arrived on the island of Guernsey in the English Channel. It is told that a ship carrying boxes of the bulbs was shipwrecked and the bulbs were washed up on the island. The bulbs became established and multiplied around the coast. Swathes of these fabulous flowers now grow on the island & produce a breathtaking scene, especially on a dull autumn day.

During the summer, it appears as nothing more than a cluster of strappy, glossy green leaves. Starting in September, the flower stems push up from among the leaves looking, at first, like “snakes rising to the music of a native charmer.” It is perhaps the most beautiful of the “frilly” *Nerine* species. The nearly two-foot flower stalks are topped with large umbels of five to ten trumpet-shaped, faintly-scented, brilliant pink flowers that have wavy-edged petals.

‘*Nerine*’ symbolizes freedom. Freedom is our most precious treasure & over the past months, with lockdowns & tight restrictions, we’ve come to treasure our ‘freedom’ even more!

These lucky flowers also represent good fortune. Spread the joy of good fortune to your family and friends. Remember that Autumn carries more gold in its pocket than all the other seasons. Note how the trees do not cling to their leaves. Autumn is about releasing the old to make way for the new. We are fortunate to have what we have & be what we are – so whatever the ‘new’ will be, it will be as good as we make it. “For man, as for flower and beast and bird, the supreme triumph is to be most vividly, most perfectly alive.” (D. H. Lawrence)