



PHOTOS BY DEBBY FINLEY

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# Counting on Crocosmia for gardens

**Question:** What is a pretty, hardy bulb for my pollinator garden?

**Answer:** A small genus of flowering plants in the iris family, Iridaceae, called Crocosmia, might be a wonderful choice.

Also known as montbretia, coppertips or falling stars, it is native to the grasslands of southern and eastern Africa. Crocosmia comes from the Greek words krokos meaning “saffron” and osme meaning “odor” – from the dried leaves emitting a strong smell like that of saffron when immersed in hot water.

Crocosmia is a herbaceous perennial that is grown from clump-forming corms. Like its cousin, Gladiolus, Crocosmia have similar sword-like foliage and flowers that open in succession from the bottom up. The trumpet-shaped blooms are lined up in rows along the flower stalks and prominent stamens and stigmas flare out well beyond the petals.

Most Crocosmia are colored in various shades of yellow, orange and red and stand 1 ½-4 feet in height, depending on the variety.

Plant in the spring after the danger of frost has passed. In



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well-drained soil, plant the corms 2-3 inches deep and 8-10 inches apart, with the pointed end facing up. Mass the corms together in groups of 10 or more for the best effect.

Feed after initial planting or in early spring with a balanced slow-release fertilizer formulated for bulbs and tubers. Watch for spider mites as they can cause significant damage to the foliage.

Crocosmia thrives in the full sun but also grows well in partial shade and will bloom mid to late summer. These bulbs are winter-hardy in temperate regions and do well in zones 5-9. They can stay in the ground year-round in all but the harshest climates, reliably blooming season after season.

Once the flower clusters are completely spent, they will simply fall off, giving way to attractive seedpods that last into fall. When the leaves die back, you can cut them



Crocosmia Prince of Orange has vivid reddish-orange flowers and exceptionally large seedpods in the fall.

down to an inch or two above ground level. Enthusiastic multipliers, Crocosmia should be divided every two to three years to prevent overcrowding and keep them vigorous.

Crocosmia Lucifer is one of the best-known cultivars, with magnificent scarlet-red flowers on purple-tinted stems. It grows to as tall as 4 feet with a spread of 12-18 inches.

Also popular is the Crocosmia Prince of Orange with vivid reddish-orange flowers and exceptionally large seedpods in the fall.

These hardy summer-blooming bulbs bring a tropical flair to Oregon

gardens. They are attractive growing against fences and are good companions for ornamental grasses and flowering shrubs. The lily-like flowers light up summer garden beds and borders and are especially irresistible to hummingbirds.

Crocosmia is deer and rabbit resistant and provides beautiful cut flowers for your home.

*Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu), by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.*