
MICHIGAN LILY

BY TERRY BONACE, ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION GROUP



The delicate but very colorful Michigan lily (*Lilium michiganense*) appears each year just in time for the ruckus of the Fourth-of-July fireworks. You can find Michigan lilies in our woods, along the Calumet Trail, in the State Park, and along Beverly Drive, just as faithfully as the Fourth of July celebrations. You will not see it in the dryer roadsides like Lake Front Drive—it prefers moister soils. Often partially hidden among tall grasses and plants, it takes an observant eye to locate. Once you become accustomed to it, you will spot it in many locations. It can't help but cheer you to see it. The bright orange petals, technically called “tepals” in lilies and some related flowers, have small purple or brown spots. These spotted petals are curved upward, giving the flower the form of a hat or turban (for that reason, this kind of lily was often called a “Turk's cap” lily). It also has 5 to 7 leaves appearing in whorls (a botanical word meaning the leaves form a circle around the stem), and reaches a height of four to five feet. All of these features make it a striking specimen. I know that summer is truly arrived when the Michigan lily appears.



Michigan lilies require cross pollination to produce viable seeds. This means that pollen from one plant must be carried to the flower of another plant for fertilization to occur. Cross pollination can be carried out by wind, insects, or animals. These beautiful flowers naturally draw the most attractive members of the animal world, including large sphinx moths and showy butterflies like monarchs and great spangled fritillaries, not to mention the ruby-throated hummingbird.

A similar cultivated lily, called the “tiger lily” (*Lilium lancifolium*) has naturalized, or at least remains, in former homesteads in the Beverly Shores area. You can distinguish this lily from the native Michigan lily by its stouter appearance, its growth in dryer habitats, and the small, nearly black bulblets that appear along the stem.

If you need help to identify plants, both native and non-native, on your property, the Environmental Restoration Group will be glad to help you. Don't hesitate to contact Terry Bonace (tbonace@gmail.com) or Candice Smith (candicepetersonsmith@gmail.com) for assistance. Please look at our web site at www.bserg.org for more information on native and non-native plants of Beverly Shores.
