Lest anyone should accuse me of writing only about small obscure flowers, I am going to turn now to some of the largest and showiest of Virginia’s flowers—three beautiful members of the lily family.

The Liliaceae is a magnificent family. Widely distributed over most of the earth, it contains at least 240 genera and over 4000 species. Its representatives are especially abundant in warm temperate and tropical regions. In evolutionary terms the family is now believed to represent a basic stock of monocotyledonous plants from whose antecedents developed the great majority of modern monocots such as the amaryllises, irises, palms, arums and orchids. The family is important economically largely for the ornamental value of so many of its members. Tulips, lilies, scillas, hyacinths and crocuses constitute the bulk of the bulb trade, which consists of a huge international network, particularly centered on Holland. Asparagus is a member of the lily family; so is *Urginea*, from whose bulbs a rat poison, ‘red squill,’ can be extracted, and *Aloe*, from which comes the drug ‘aloin.’

Virginia can certainly hold its own with its attractive members of the lily family. The three which I am going to describe here are all native to our state’s woodlands and meadows and will be found blooming from now on throughout a good part of the summer.

Perhaps the Turk’s Cap Lily, *Lilium superbum*, is the best known of the three. It is the one which attains the greatest size, often growing to at least 8 feet and occasionally having as many as 40 flowers on one stem. The Canada Lily, *Lilium canadense*, can grow to 5 feet, but as far as I know has never achieved quite as many flowers per stem as the Turk’s Cap. The Wood Lily, *Lilium philadelphicum*, grows to about 3 feet and has from one to five blooms on each stem. All of these lilies have spotted petals; they are often referred to, in a loose group with other similarly marked species, as the spotted lilies.

The flowers of the Turk’s Cap Lily are usually bright orange, with a characteristic green central star, stamens which project out far beyond the corolla, and petals which are bent right round backwards, supposedly giving the flower the appearance of a ‘Turk’s Cap.’ The strongly reflexed petals distinguish these flowers from those of the Canada Lily, which are also nodding and numerous on each stem, but whose petals only bend outwards at right angles instead of curving right back to touch the stem. Although the Canada Lily can be orange or red, it is generally a much more yellow color than the Turk’s Cap, and lacks the green central star. The Wood Lily is the only one of the spotted lilies whose flowers are not nodding. The blooms stand erect on their stalks, as do those of the unsotted day lilies. The Wood Lily varies from orange to a brilliant scarlet and their petals are not reflexed at all.

In general, the leaves of all three lilies are arranged in whorls although in the Canada and Turk’s Cap these are intermingled with a few single leaves scattered alternately along the stem, particularly higher up towards the flower. The Wood Lily intergrades west of the Appalachians with a form whose leaves are all arranged at intervals up the stem and not in whorls. The leaves of the Canada Lily are roughened at the margin and on the veins underneath. The Turk’s Cap has perfectly smooth leaves, acutely pointed, arrow-shaped with the widest part in the middle.

Both the Canada and the Turk’s Cap Lilies like moist habitats but the former needs the wettest places of all; it is essentially a brookside plant. The Turk’s Cap Lily
the intergradation with a form known as *L. andinum*, so it is a little hard to define the exact limits of its range in that direction. The Canada Lily is getting close to the southern limits of its range in Virginia; it is primarily a more northern plant. The Turk's Cap Lily has a widespread distribution from New Brunswick all the way down through the Carolinas to Georgia and Alabama and as far west as Tennessee, Ohio and Minnesota.

Oriental poets apparently applied the word 'lily' to any beautiful flower, so it is hard to know whether the 'lilies of the field' really applied to any plant of the genus *Lilium*. There are some brilliant scarlet anemones in Palestine which are sometimes considered to have been the flowers arrayed in greater glory than Solomon without toiling or spinning. However, there are also some lovely wild lilies, so it could just as well have been a member of the true lily family.

In medieval times, the bulb was used medicinally. When pounded up with honey it was reputedly good for scurvy and ulcers, a strange mixture of ailments. The bland starch and sugar, I suppose, soothed the ulcer, while perhaps some ascorbic acid from the fresh plant helped to assuage the scurvy. Mixed with barley and made into cakes, it was used as cure for dropsy, and an infusion or ointment made by boiling with vinegar was said to remove corns. I cannot say that modern medicine confirms this wide range of marvelous properties. The scaly bulbs of true lilies, however, are certainly edible, and certain species are regularly cultivated by the Chinese and Japanese. The bulbs of our native species can be eaten when cooked, and were used as food by the Indians, but for myself, and I hope for most other folk as well, I would far rather let the bulbs grow up into lilies that I can look at, and seek my carbohydrates elsewhere.

I do not want to encourage mass deprivation of the wild scene, but I must in honesty admit that the lilies can be transplanted quite easily, especially the Canada and Turk's Cap lily; usually they thrive under cultivation. Dr. R. K. Burns has some fantastic specimens in his orchid and lily garden at the Mountain Lake Biological Station. And I believe that the earlier mentioned record of forty flowers on the stem of a Turk’s Cap Lily was taken from a plant under partially cultivated conditions.

Our Virginia lilies have surprisingly little scent, yet their bright, attractive flowers make them prime favorites of hummingbirds, bees and Monarch butterflies which visit them in search of nectar. Thus, they have ample facilities for cross-pollination and produce brown, flake-like seeds which germinate the following spring.

A fluent author once remarked that the lilies had everything, beauty, stature, hardness and unfailing grace, to which the quick rejoinder was made that these were the exact attributes which a man looked for in the perfect wife. Certainly, many a woman aspires to be credited with such qualities, and I think we can safely say that our three beautiful lilies, without question, possess all of them.