

Real Estate

GARDEN FILES

The leafless wonder

C S Bewli

Bowiea volubilis commonly known as the 'climbing onion' is an unusual bulbous house plant with a tight swollen spherical base made up of many overlapping scales.

At maturity of 5-6 years some bulbs tend to split and produce smaller bulbs to form clumps. During winters when in dormancy the outer scales shrivel and turn brown and assume paper-like epidermis like that of an onion.

It is a very slow-growing and low maintenance species that is adapted to survive in drought as well as in floods and can accept severe winters and summers of our region. A clump of this species is capable of giving a different dimension to the garden. The plant should be kept in every home garden as it can remain 'happy' in the same small pot for 5-6 years to grow up to 10 cm in diameter without requiring repotting.

This species is uniquely distinguished from other caudiciforms due to its almost total absence of foliage and this feature has made it a collectable plant among bulb enthusiasts world-wide.

The plants burst into growth in early February producing one or more very fast-growing entwining vines that grow about 4 metres in length. With no tendrils, these bright green vines either climb or scramble on the ground. For the plant to exude beauty, some sort of vertical frame should be provided for it to gracefully coil around it.



The fast-growing vines of this plant are completely leafless

Being leaf-less, these vines are actually the plant's flower stems that produce a profusion of star-shaped tiny flowers with greenish to greenish-white petals. The flower with six petals is about a centimetre in diameter. It is an ideal plant to be displayed vertically in a hanging basket during summers.



Bulbs of 'climbing onion'

Propagation is through seeds and can also be done by separating and potting bulbs when in dormancy.

— Writer is the President of National Cactus and Succulent Society of India.

Caring tips

Though it is a hardy plant, but to grow it into a show plant, it should be:

- Grown in well-drained compost.
- Fertilised with half spoonful of NPK once during the month of February.
- Placed on a sunny window sill or any other suitable location away from direct sunlight for the vines to look fresh.
- Provided with some trellis or any structure for the vines to entwine around to exude its beauty.
- Kept dry during winter and the compost should be allowed to dry between waterings.