

Trick or treats — money or eats. That’s how I used to say it as a kid when trick or treating on Halloween night. This year I could have said, Trick or treats — plants or eats.

When I arrived at work on the morning of Halloween, sitting on the counter of our break room was a dish of freshly baked pumpkin rolls and two bowls of popcorn balls. With a popcorn ball clenched between my teeth and attempting to remove my coat with one hand while grasping a pumpkin roll in the other, I spotted a large brown paper bag sitting atop my desk. Munching away, I excitedly opened the bag and discovered it was full of *Ornithogalum saundersiae* bulbs. Later that afternoon, a man stopped by my office requesting help in identifying a weed. Upon his departure, he rewarded me with a small potted *Lychnis chalconica* ‘alba’ as a gift. How lucky can one get. With no begging on my part whatsoever, this Halloween I received special eats and plants as treats.

Today, as I write this column, the pumpkin rolls and the popcorn balls are fleeting memories; however, the plant treats offer great expectations.



For those not familiar, an *Ornithogalum* is commonly called a salt and pepper plant or a Star of Bethlehem. This bulbous plant is a perennial in Zones 8 though 10; in Nebraska, it grows only as an annual. The tender bulbs cannot survive our winters. They must be lifted and stored indoors for the winter; otherwise, they will perish. When in bloom, *Ornithogalum* bears clusters of delicate, star-shaped, pure-white flowers with greenish- black eyes perched on slender stalks high above



(four to five feet) lush, dark-green, strap-like foliage.

While researching, I discovered that, for a striking effect, *Ornithogalum* should be planted in groups. Fortunately, I now have nearly a dozen bulbs. Next spring, I know exactly where in my yard I will plant them. For now, they are safely stored in the warmth of my basement.



*Lychnis chalconica* 'alba' is commonly referred to as Maltese cross. Maltese cross has long been a popular perennial for sunny borders. Long lived and very reliable, by mid-summer, these plants form an upright clump of bright green leaves with taller stems bearing large clusters of scarlet-orange flowers. Maltese cross flowers are attractive to bees and butterflies. Perhaps you may have noticed the word *alba* following the genus species name of the plant that I

received. Alba is a Latin word meaning white. My Maltese cross will produce white flowers rather than scarlet flowers. An individual blossom closely resembles the shape of a Maltese cross. Perhaps that is how it acquired its common name. Even though my little plant is a perennial, it is too late in the season to plant it outdoors. Rather than taking the chance of it being destroyed by freezing winter temperatures, I plan to wait until next spring before I set it out in my yard.



In the meantime, it, too, is safely tucked within the confines of our basement. However, unlike the *Ornithogalum* bulbs lying dormant in a bag, I have this little plant growing under lights.

Thanks to Valerie, Megan, Geraldine and Al, this year's Halloween trick or treats turned out to be great plants and yummy eats!