

The North Star Lily Society's Tips for Growing Lilies

Lilium, or true lilies, are the most regal of all flowers - genuine garden aristocrats. Stunning in cut arrangements, potted, naturalized, or in formal gardens, lilies are favorites of florists, landscape designers, and home gardeners alike. Lilies are as easy to grow as many other perennials. If you select varieties that are suited to your growing region and follow a few simple rules, your garden may have lilies in bloom from May into September.

Types of lilies and their average bloom time are:

- **Martagon Lilies:** Tolerate the filtered sun of shade gardens. Bloom time: late May through June.
- **Asiatic Lilies:** Hardy and easy to grow. Bloom time: End of June through July. Some into August.
- **LA (Longiflorum/Asiatic) Lilies:** Huge flowers. Bloom time: End of June through July.
- **Trumpet Lilies:** Dramatic, fragrant, statuesque. Bloom time: July into August.
- **Oriental Lilies:** Beautiful, outstanding fragrant. Shorter lived in Minnesota. Bloom time: End of July well into August.
- **Interdivisional Lily Hybrids:** Include Orienpets, Asiapets, LA's, Longiflorum/Oriental, etc. These genetic crosses are eye-catching and often fragrant. Bloom time: July to late August.
- **Species Lilies:** The "wild" starting point for their hybrid relations. Bloom time: Varies early to late.

Plant the bulbs as soon as possible on arrival, weather permitting. If this is not possible keep the bulbs in the coolest place, which must be frost-free. Do not store in the refrigerator where apples are also being kept. A gas given off by the apples may cause the lily bulbs to rot and die.

While lilies do not require special soil, they must not be planted in any location where water will stand on the bulbs. A porous, rapid-draining soil is best. Work the soil to a depth of about 8 inches and incorporate a generous amount of well-rotted manure and compost. Plant the bulbs 4" to 6" deep and also give them enough elbow room. A radius of at least 6 inches per bulb gives each stem its own spot in the sun. If your soil contains too much clay, add sand, moistened peat moss or compost to increase porosity. It has been said that lilies, like clematis "prefer their heads in the sun and their feet in the shade." Shredded leaves or leaf mold make excellent mulch material. Planting among ground covers such as vinca or ferns may also give good cover for the bulbs. To obtain best results in years to come, add a fresh top dressing of compost in autumn when the plants have died down. Water should be applied liberally during extended dry periods. Lilies should be dug and separated every 3 to 5 years to prevent overcrowding.

Lilies are heavy feeders and should be fertilized early in the spring and again after they are done blooming. Apply a complete fertilizer (10-10-10) or a combination of organic nutrients that provide adequate amounts of nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus. Water thoroughly. Shoots sometimes emerge in early Spring before the last frost. Lilium blooms are developing at the top of the emerging stem. If a heavy frost or freeze is predicted, cover the lilies so the buds will not be ruined. Do not cultivate deeply around your lilies since there are feeder roots near the surface of the soil that could easily be damaged.

Depending on the variety, blooms begin in May and could continue into September. For cut arrangements, the blooms will last longer if the buds are cut when fully colored. When cutting, remember to leave at least 1/3rd of the stem and leaves which will continue to feed the bulb for next year. When your lilies are done blooming cut off developing seed pods unless you plan to save seeds. Leave the rest of the stem and leaves. Remember, the more foliage this year, the more blossoms you will have next year.

Along with gathering seeds, lilies may be propagated by using bulb scales, stem bulbils, underground stem bulblets and by bulb division. Seeds, scales, bulbils and bulblets may require two to three years to reach sufficient size to produce a bloom. But how many other plants can claim so many fascinating ways to multiply?



Visit www.northstarlilysociety.com for lily culture and North Star Lily Society information.

For further lily culture information visit the North American Lily Society's web site: www.lilies.org.