



# Lily Culture and Care

## Group Summaries, Planting, Growing and Propagation

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### GROUP SUMMARIES

**Martagon** lilies are among the best choices for Wisconsin gardens due to their hardy bulbs and ability to be planted in shady areas. The plants produce large numbers of small, often spotted flowers that generally face downward and are carried on sturdy stems. Flowers often have a spicy scent and bloom at the end of June in our area. They are more expensive, but are longer lived than most other lilies. An added value is that they grow very well in shade gardens.

The martagon group does very well in shaded areas and do not require support. They grow well among Hosta and other shade loving plants. If planted in full sun, this group will produce shorter plants, tending not to look as healthy. Good garden soil is preferred by this group, but the addition of limestone chips in the planting hole as a top dressing produces better growth due to their hunger for calcium rich soil. Martagons are not difficult to grow, but are slower to establish, often pouting for a year or two after planting. A planting site in which they will not often be disturbed is appreciated and they will reward you with years of wonderful bloom at the end of June (in Wisconsin).

**OT or Orientpet** (oriental x trumpet). OT hybrids are generally tall sturdy growers and have a wonderful fragrance. These are often marketed as 'Tree Lilies', but in truth are only very sturdy growers that need little if any support. Orientpet flower size is often very large and long lasting. These plants typically bloom at the end of July and into August here in Wisconsin.

**Asiatics.** This diverse group is the hardiest and earliest blooming of the large flowered lilies here in Wisconsin. Different cultivars exhibit a wide range of flower color, size and carriage. Almost all bloom early in the summer season (late June into mid-July). Few have any fragrance, but are spectacular in the number of flowers they produce and the vigor of plants. Some cultivars produce upward facing flowers, while others present them downward (Turks cap). Many are useful as centerpieces or accents in the garden, depending on their specific flowering characteristics.

**LA** (*longiflorum* x asiatic). This, often fragrant group has a wide range in flower size and color. They tends to flower after the Asiatics (with some exceptions) and before the Orientpets. Flowers often have unique coloration and are generally outward or upward facing. LA's have proven to be hardy-vigorous growers here in Wisconsin, make excellent garden plants and are useful as cut flowers.

**LO** (*longiflorum* x oriental). Hardiness can be a problem with this group. LO's produce huge Easter lily type flowers, but lack hardiness in very cold winters. Customers that have protected gardens have reported good results with LO's though. Given favorable conditions LO's can be grown in Wisconsin with a bit more care in siting.

**Orientials** are one the most commonly available lilies and have exquisite fragrance. However, these plants typically do not live for very long in Wisconsin. Winter hardiness can be a problem,

but summer heat is also debilitating. Orienpets have many of the same floral characteristics of this group, but are of much easier culture and live longer lives. Therefore it is recommended to choose plants from OT group rather than Oriental lilies.

## **PLANTING**

*Lilium* can be planted in spring, summer and fall. Spring planted bulbs will produce shorter stems and often less flowers the first year, due to lack of an established root system.

Lilies can be readily moved in the summer as well, while the plants have flowers and foliage on them. It is recommended that, when transplanting in the summer, the plants are cut back half way and watered in well. The flowers can then be put in a vase and brought indoors for further enjoyment. Summer transplants often lose their foliage early and do not look prosperous, but will almost always come up the next year looking like nothing had been done to them.

Fall planting is preferable, since root growth occurs before growth initiates in the spring and the plants produce more robust stems and greater numbers of flowers.

Select a site that is well drained. Dig a hole that will easily accommodate the bulb and allow the spreading of its roots. The hole should be 3-4 inches (7-10 cm) deep for smaller bulbs and for the larger trumpets and orienpets 4-6 inches (10-15cm). We prefer the six inch depth for lilies that produce very long stems, as this allows for a sturdier foundation to support the plant. The soil at the bottom of the hole should be loosened another six inches so new rooting can occur easily.

Spacing of the bulbs should be a minimum of 6 to 10 inches if they are to be planted in groups. Remember, that the single bulbs will give rise to many new bulbs, in coming years, to create a larger clump formation. Many gardeners will plant lilies in large groups by digging a very large hole and placing the bulbs at various distances within the excavation. This works very well and is often a time saver. Building a slight mound over the planting helps water to drain away and is recommended here in northeast Wisconsin.

Once the bulbs have been placed in the holes, cover them with soil and lightly pack the soil down. If the soil is dry, a soaking of the soil will help to get them started.

Mulching is usually not necessary, but it does help to prevent frost heaving in the first year of growth. If *Lilium* are grown in a hot location, that becomes dry quickly, mulch can aid in keeping the roots cool and moist.

## **GROWING**

Lilies are generally of easy culture, if a couple of key requirements are met. The number one need of all lilies is a well-drained soil that will retain some moisture. A wet soil placement is a death wish for lily bulbs. A wide range of soils may grow lilies well and this includes clay. Clay does, unfortunately, retain water for long periods, so it is wise to not plant lilies in areas that are of low elevation in combination with this type of soil. Adding compost, sand, gravel, peat and other aerating materials to clay will help lilies to perform better in the garden. In a perfect world, soil that is friable and has rich organic matter would work best, but garden soils range far and wide. Even with this in mind, *Lilium* will grow well in very average soils.

*Lilium* love sun, but can be easily placed in semi-shade conditions. Shadier placements will produce longer stems that may not be as strong as a plant in full sun. The plants are adaptable, however, and will respond nicely to less well lit environments. Afternoon shade is actually beneficial since it doesn't allow the soil around the bulbs to become so hot and dry. *Lilium* do not like hot soils, in fact, Orientals and many species prefer cool soil conditions.

Lilies are a fairly straightforward plant to grow, but a few pointers may be of help. Spring is a wonderful time to enjoy emerging plants. The gorgeous deep green whorls are beautiful and interesting; they are also incredibly brittle. Careful marking of plantings is advised so that the emerging plants are not inadvertently stepped on. Unfortunately, *Lilium* are favorite meals for both rabbits and deer. Protection from rabbits and deer are especially important in spring, if these critters are common in your area. Wire cages are effective, as are repellents if this is a problem for you. Plants are often presumed dead by gardeners when they do not see them in the place they were planted. In actuality, the plants may have been chewed to the ground by an animal before the gardener took note of their emergence. Even if this misfortune befalls a lily, it will, in all likelihood, come up again the following year!

In 2010 we had a very late frost that destroyed nearly every *Lilium* plant in our sales field, or so we thought. In the spring of 2011 we saw nearly every plant come back up, in some cases a little smaller, but most looked great! Patience will reward the gardener when growing this plant. As summer arrives a quick look at the progress of the *Lilium* plants is always a good idea. At this time the stems are reaching maturity and flower buds are beginning to show. Very tall stems found in the trumpet group will likely benefit from staking. Without staking the stems may break or lean as the heavy flowers enlarge and open. Planting *Lilium* next to fences is an excellent idea, as the fence serves as permanent stake. Watering may also be a consideration at this time. *Lilium* require moist soils at all times in order to perform to their fullest. Soaking the ground is a great way to water, but not overhead watering. Overhead watering can encourage the formation of disease and create the perfect environment for powdery mildew and botrytis. Overly wet conditions are not appreciated either and may rot bulbs, thus care should be taken when siting them and watering.

Autumn is the time to begin cleaning up the once beautiful stems. Once the stems have turned yellow and leaves have dropped or yellowed they should be cut to the ground and removed from the site. By doing this, any diseases that impacted the plants the previous growing season cannot re-infect the plants in the coming summer. Watering may be necessary if drought is impacting the area. Even if the plants are not visible, they are still growing and making new roots.

## **PROPAGATION**

### **Division and Transplanting**

Again fall is the key time for dividing and transplanting lilies. Typically, lilies will need division every 6 or 7 years, some varieties less time, others more. The bulbs may be separated before the clumps reach large size if wanted.

Before transplanting or dividing the plants, have a reason to do so. Are the stems in the clumps smaller and more numerous than they once were? Do you have a new location that you would like to spread the bulbs to? Do you have friends you'd like to share your plants with? These are all great reasons to move and divide the clumps.

Division should occur after the plants have gone dormant (stems above ground have died). When digging the clumps many small bulbs may be attached to the stems below the

ground; these may all be separated from the stem and planted singly. The bulbs below the stem will likely be larger and may have many sections. These sections can usually be broken apart by simply applying pressure away from the center of the mass. All of the above mentioned can now be planted as described in the planting section.

### **Other Forms of Propagation**

Simple division of the bulbs, as described above, is the most common form of *Lilium* propagation. Other propagation methods range from planting bulbils (black pea-like proliferations found at the leaf axils on some varieties), tissue culture and bulb scale propagation. Tissue culture is used commercially to propagate many identical plants at once and isn't a likely choice for the average gardener. Bulbils and scale propagation are relatively easy ways to multiply any cultivars one might want more of.

Bulbils are the small black spherical shaped proliferations found along the stem of certain *Lilium* cultivars. These may be collected just as they begin to drop naturally and should be planted an inch or so below the ground. They will take two to four years to develop into blooming size plants, so be patient.

Bulb scale propagation is a bit more involved, but basically involves peeling away some of the scales enveloping the bulb and keeping them in a warm damp place for a couple of months. This is usually done in the fall during transplant of the *Lilium*. After a while the scales will begin to grow many small bulblets on their surface. These bulblets may be removed after a time and chilled in the refrigerator for three months and then planted in the garden come spring. These will also need to be planted shallow and will require some two to four years to bloom (sometimes less, depending on the cultivar).

For further information on growing and propagating *Lilium* we recommend the book **Let's Grow Lilies**. This small book is loaded with outstanding information covering almost all aspects of this Genera.

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