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# How to Grow Liriope: The Complete Plant Guide



Liriope muscari, 'Moneymaker,' is an erect evergreen perennial that produces blue-purple flowers in panicles from August to October. It is also

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# Learn How to Plant, Grow, and Care for Liriope

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With graceful leaves and purple flower spikes, liriope is one of the prettiest ground covers and edging plants. It thrives where other plants don't—and isn't bothered by pests or disease—so it's a fantastic solution for the right spot. Learn how to plant, grow, and care for liriope plants.

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## About Liriope

Liriope are also known as lilyturf. The name is pronounced *la-rye-oh-pee* or *li-rye-oh-pee*. While they may resemble an ornamental grass, liriope are an ever-

cari; however, *L. spicata* is listed as invasive in some states, so we'll focus on the more popular *L. muscari*.

As perennials, lilyturf are hardy in USDA Zones 4 to 10, depending on the cultivar.

You can mow them in the spring, and they'll grow back. These knee-high plants grow in mounds or clumps with slender, sword-like leaves arching from the base to form a fountain effect. The foliage is usually dark green, but many variegated green and white or cream colors have been bred and are easily found. Flowers appear in late summer to fall, with dozens of small violet or white flowers born on tall spikes called *racemes*.

Liriope's shorter growth form and graceful arching leaves make it a great foliage plant for most of the growing season. It excels as a ground cover on slopes or challenging spots, an edging plant in a garden bed, lining a path, or at the edge of a rock garden. Plant it around your mailbox or anywhere else you don't want to

## ADVERTISEMENT



Blue flowering Liriope muscari plants seen at Kew Gardens. Credit: Joe Kuis

Liriope look great planted en masse or in a bed with other sun to partial shade-loving plants that need good drainage, like bleeding heart (*Dicentra spectabilis*), coneflowers (*Echinacea*), and Astilbes.

Liriope are rather tough plants and rank medium on the scale of deer resistance. Once established, they tolerate dry condi-

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## PLANTING

Liriope plants like full sun but will grow in dappled light and partial shade. They grow fine in average soil but also need a spot with good drainage. They do best if you add a good dose of organic matter to your soil.

### When to Plant Liriope

Liriope plants are usually purchased from the garden center as small potted plants. They can be planted outside after the last spring frost, and, like many perennials, in warmer climates, they also do well when planted in mid-autumn. They'll establish

## How to Plant Liriope

Liriope is quite easy to transplant. Pick a suitable spot and grab your hand trowel! While Liriope are cold-hardy perennials, don't forget to harden them off before planting and wait until the last frosts are over in spring.

- Prepare the site by working in a shovel full of good quality compost.
- Squeeze the edges of the plastic nursery pot and gently work the plant free. If it seems stuck, try watering it and waiting for 20 minutes.
- Trim any circling roots and prepare a hole twice the size of the rootball.
- Set the plant in the hole so the soil level of the plant's rootball matches that of the surrounding ground. Adjust as necessary by digging a bit deeper or filling in. Don't leave a hard pan at the bottom of the hole. Loosen it up with your trowel.
- Replace the soil you removed, applying light pressure as you go to eliminate

- No fertilizer is immediately needed, but a layer of mulch will help to keep the weeds down and the soil moisture even.

## GROWING

Lilyturf belongs in the category of easy-to-grow plants. Once established, they don't need much attention and will come back year after year.

### How to Grow Liriope

Newly transplanted or divided lilyturf plants need frequent watering while they become established. Weekly waterings—or more often in dry conditions—will help them thrive while they settle in. After the first growing season, liriope don't usually need supplemental watering except during dry weather. If you are watering the rest of your garden, go ahead and water the liriope. Otherwise, they'll be fine on their own.

also be fertilized yearly in spring with a general-purpose slow-release fertilizer.

Mulch will help to keep the soil moist, which they like, and keep weeds down between plants.

Spent flower spikes can be removed or left as winter interest. It's common for the foliage to die back in late autumn, but leave any dead leaves until spring. They'll serve as habitat for beneficial insects. In early spring, remove any dead foliage and stems.

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Big blue lilyturf aka liriope has beautiful blade-like leaves and flowers appear later in the season. Credit: Nokzd

## How to Divide and Transplant Liriope

It is typically unnecessary to propagate liriope plants as they are aggressive growers. However, if they are getting crowded and spreading too aggressively, you may wish to divide and transplant. In the spring, lift the clump and brush off some of the soil. Tease the rootball to find natural dividing points and slice through with a sharp garden knife or trowel, keeping some of the crowns with each root section. Replant immediately and water well for the first year.

### Types

Check the botanical name on the tag if you intend to purchase the slower-spreading *Liriope muscari* and avoid the more aggressive *Liriope spicata* which spreads by underground rhizomes. Both are likely to be labeled as lilyturf. A separate plant, *Ophiopogon jaburan*, also goes by the common name lilyturf.

- ‘Super Blue’ is one of the showiest of the group. Dark green foliage is topped in fall with spikes of purple-blue flowers. It generally reaches 15-18 inches tall and about 18 inches wide.
- ‘Gold Banded’ is a variegated variety with gold edging along the borders of the leaves. Tall racemes full of lilac-purple flowers add to the show, but this one is great as a foliage plant for the rest of the growing season.
- ‘Majestic’ has slightly wider leaves and shorter but more densely packed flowers. The plant is a little smaller and often reaches only a foot high.

## GARDENING PRODUCTS



## PESTS/DISEASES

Liriope is not often bothered by pests or diseases but can suffer health issues in poorly drained soils.

- Anthracnose
- Crown rot
- Slugs—If you have slug problems, remove the mulch for a few sunny days or try some beer slug traps!

## WIT AND WISDOM

named Liriope, and the species name muscari was inspired by the flowers resembling those of grape hyacinths (*Muscari armeniacum*).

- If the flowers are left intact, they may develop dark blueish-black berries that can last well into winter.
- Planting lilyturf close together forms an attractive ground cover with the added benefit of showy flowers in autumn. Dividing plants, as explained above, is an excellent way to fill in any bare spots.

### ORNAMENTAL GARDENING

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Andy Wilcox is a flower farmer and master gardener with a passion for soil health, small producers, forestry, and horticulture.

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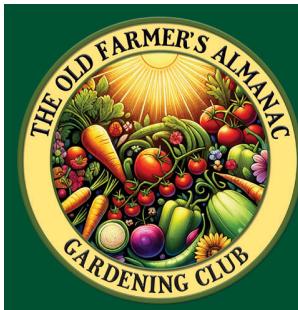
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