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How to Care for Clivia



Photo Credit: ACLJ

Botanical Name:
Clivia spp.

Plant Type:
Houseplant

Sun Exposure:
Partial Sun

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Growing Clivia: Watering, Light, Repotting, and Pests

By [Robin Sweetser](#)

Last Updated: January 9, 2025



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The sunny orange blossoms on clivia plants contrast nicely with the bleak landscape outside the window during the harsh winter months. Their flowers seem to arrive just when we need them the most, after the craziness of the holidays has settled down and the cold of winter has settled in. Learn more about clivia, including how to get it to bloom and how to repot it!

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About Clivia

Most clivias are grown as interesting houseplants and, as far as houseplants go, there aren't many that are tougher. Since they are drought tolerant, they can go for several weeks without water; in fact, they need a dry, cold period to initiate flowering.

The first question that might be asked about clivia is how to pronounce it. Is it

but the story of the plant's origin points to the latter as the preferred articulation: In 1828, John Lindley, a botanist at England's Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, named the genus to honor Lady Charlotte Clive (rhymes with "dive"), an avid gardener who had cultivated and brought to bloom the first *Clivia nobilis* in England (she may have been the first to do so outside of its native South Africa).

First collected by English naturalist William J. Burchell and brought to England in 1815, *C. nobilis* is a pendulous flower type like many of its cousins. It garnered much attention but fell out of favor following the discovery in the early 1850s of *C. miniata*, with its showier umbel, or cluster, of upright, trumpet-shaped, reddish-orange flowers. More than 200 years later, for many people, it's *C. miniata*'s spectacular blooms that have the most appeal and make it the most common species grown in the United States today. *C. miniata* does require some special attention in order to be

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A member of the same family (Amaryllidaceae) as [amaryllis](#), clivia shares with its cousin the characteristics of strap-like leaves and similarly shaped flowers on a tall stem called a scape (although amaryllis blooms are substantially larger, and clivia retains its foliage year-round).

Clivia, also known as a bush lily, is a naturally evergreen, shade-loving, herbaceous perennial hardy only in Zones 9 and 10 in the United States. Although suitable for in-ground planting, it is vulnerable to frost and thus treated as a houseplant in

- [Types of Lilies: 10 Favorite Lilies to Elevate Your Garden](#)
- [How to Grow Calla Lilies: The Complete Calla Lily Flower Guide](#)
- [How to Grow Red Spider Lily: The Complete Guide](#)

PLANTING

Clivia is propagated by division or seed.

Seeds follow the flowers but take up to a year to ripen, during which time they will turn from green to yellow or red, depending on the color of the flower. Harvest seeds once ripe and color has changed.

According to Susan Mahr, [University of Wisconsin – Madison](#), the seeds are slow to germinate (allow several weeks) and mature to bloom in 3 to 5 years. If seeds are unwanted, cut off the fruit after the flowers fall and then remove the scape (stem) at its base after it dries up.



Clivia will develop seeds after the flowers drop. Clip the flower stem off to keep the plant from expending energy on forming seeds.

Division is preferred. Mature (3- to 4-year-old) plants usually yield offsets—new plants produced by a mother plant, complete with their own roots—on an annual basis. After the last flower fades, when offsets have three leaves (some growers recommend 9 or 10) at least 8 inches long, remove the plant carefully from the pot (it may be necessary to break a ceramic pot or cut through a plastic one).

offset(s) with roots and separate them from the mother plant by pulling or, if necessary, cutting with a clean, sharp knife. Remove any dead and/or rotting roots. If the offset has been cut off, set it and the mother plant aside overnight or even for a few days (especially if they were hose-soaked) to dry completely before repotting. Keep the bare roots in the shade during this time.

Plant in equal parts [peat moss](#) and coarse sand or [perlite](#) and place in a warm spot with moderate (not direct) sunlight.

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ter, such as in a saucer under the pot—it needs to be dry when resting in winter. Transplant when roots appear on the surface (it is normal for the roots to push up). In the wild, clivia grows not in soil but in decomposing leaf mold; in the home, it grows best in a light but rich and well-draining potting mix: Use about 50% organic matter (orchid or cactus mix), plus coconut coir or fir bark to aerate the soil. (Roots can rot in heavy, wet soil.)

GROWING

Clivia requires lighting that mimics its conditions in the wild: deep or partial shade. In the home, this means bright diffused light, such as through a north window or an east or west window shaded from sunlight. Outdoors, this means shade. (Too bright or direct sun can burn the foliage.)

Watering Clivia

Water regularly, but allow the growing

them to tolerate drought, if necessary.
(Overwatering or general wetness can cause root rot.)

How to Get Clivia to Bloom

To get them to flower indoors, stop watering and keep the plant in a bright, cool spot, below 50°F (10°C) for at least 40 days and up to 90 days. (If giving it the long 90-day rest, you might need to water if the leaves start to wilt.) After it has rested, put your clivia in a warmer spot, resume watering, and it will flower in about 60 days.

Clivia is one of our favorite [Flowering Houseplants to Brighten Winter](#)! To accomplish this, in autumn, stop watering and place the plant in a bright, cool (below 50°F) spot for 6 to 12 weeks. (If foliage wilts during this respite, water lightly.) At the conclusion, place clivia in a warmer spot, resume regular watering, and look for flowers in about 8 to 12 weeks.

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After they are done blossoming, start fertilizing the plants by watering them weekly with a half-strength, water-soluble fertilizer. Remember to water weekly. Keep fertilizing until bringing it back inside in the fall.



Stunted Scapes

Sometimes, the flower scape doesn't get tall enough to clear the leaves, and the blossoms can't fully open—disappointing after waiting a year for them to flower! This can happen for many reasons—too hot, too cold, too bright, too shady, not a long enough chill time—but usually, the fertilizer is to blame. Look for one that offers more potassium and phosphorus than nitrogen.

Clivia Likes to be Pot-bound!

Clivia bloom best when they are pot-bound. Often, the roots will push up out of the soil at the base of the plant, which is okay. They can go 3 to 5 years without repotting, but eventually, your plant will outgrow its container, become crowded, and cease flowering. This is a good time to divide it and make some plants to share with friends. Once you knock it out of its pot, it is pretty easy to pull the fans apart without doing too much damage to

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Types

There are six species of clivia and many hybrids, but the orange-flowering *C. miniata* is most commonly grown. Yellow varieties are available, but they are very expensive—around \$300! Plant breeders have introduced other colors, like red, white with green stripes or red edges, and yellow with orange tips. There are some clivia varieties with green and white striped leaves, too. All types send up a cluster of 12 to 20 small, trumpet-shaped flowers on a tall stem called a scape.

- *C. caulescens*, aka stalked clivia: grows 2 to 3 feet tall (some reach 6 feet when

in having a thick stalk that produces leaves at the top

- *C. gardenii*, aka Major Garden's clivia (for British Maj. Robert J. Garden, who discovered and collected it in 1855 and sent it to Kew, where it bloomed the next year): slender, tubular, pendulous flowers
- *C. miniata* (the name refers to minium, the color of red lead, and evokes the common flower hue): the only one of the six species that has upright or nearly upright flowers; varieties are available in other colors, as well—near-white, peach, pink, and yellow
- *C. mirabilis* ("miraculous"): discovered in 2002, thriving in full sun in southwestern Africa's Namaqualand
- *C. nobilis*: plant that inspired the genus and whose name suggests nobility; considerably slower grower than other species; from seeds, takes 6 or more years to flower
- *C. robusta*: largest and newest of the species, named in 2004; thrives in marshlands; boasts the highest scape



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PESTS/DISEASES

Diseases: [anthracnose](#), bacterial (Erwinia)
soft rot, southern blight.

WIT AND WISDOM

- Clivia contains the alkaloid lycorine, which is poisonous to pets and people (learn more about [poisonous plants to dogs and cats](#)). If eaten, it can cause vomiting and diarrhea. The roots are the most poisonous part. If eaten in large amounts, they can cause convulsions, low blood pressure, tremors, and heart arrhythmias. Nonetheless, clivia was used medicinally by the Zulus to treat fever and snakebite and to relieve pain.

FLOWERS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robin Sweetser



Robin has been a contributor to The Old Farmer's Almanac and the All-Seasons Garden Guide for many years. [Read More from Robin Sweetser](#)



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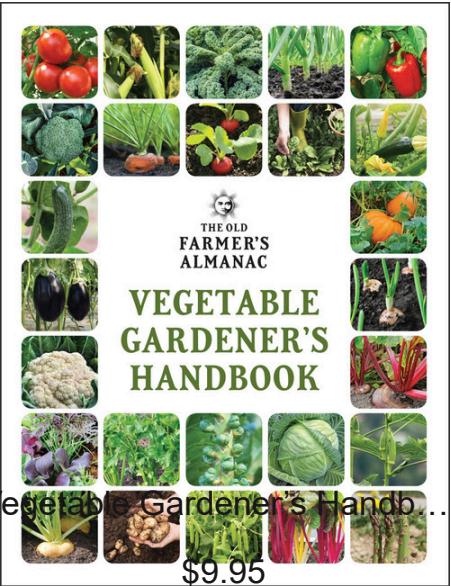
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