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# How to Grow Lilies: The Complete Lily Flower Guide



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Botanical Name:  
*Lilium* spp.

Plant Type:  
[Flower](#)

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# Planting, Growing, and Caring for Lilies

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)

**Last Updated:** January 13, 2025



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With stunning star-shaped flowers, lilies add elegance and fragrance to any garden. Enjoy their colorful blooms from spring through the first frost by blending early-blooming, mid-season, and late-blooming lilies into your garden. Learn more about choosing, planting, and growing lilies.

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## About Lilies

Everyone loves lilies! Grown from bulbs, lilies are perennials that require minimal care if planted correctly. Most lilies do well in containers and look spectacular in

True lilies belong to the genus *Lilium* and grow from plump, scaly bulbs. Several popular lily species exist, including Orientals, Asiatics, Orienpets, and Species types.

We say “true” lilies because there are also plants, such as [daylilies](#), [peace lilies](#), and [canna lilies](#), which have the term “lily” in their common name, but they’re not actually lilies at all. They do not grow from bulbs but are in a different plant genus. Water lilies aren’t lilies at all, and neither are [lily-of-the-valley](#).

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and bewitching scents. Lilies have six plain or strikingly marked tepals (“petals”) and are often trumpet-shaped, sitting atop a tall, erect stem with narrow, long, lance-shaped leaves. They come in many beautiful colors, including pink, gold, red, orange, and white.

Most lilies also take readily to containers at home in formal and naturalistic settings. Plus, they make excellent cut flowers!

To create a sequence of Lily blooms in your garden, remember that Asiatics generally flower first, followed by Orienpets and then Oriental varieties.

- **Asiatic lilies** (*Lilium* sp. - “Asiatic hybrids”) are the earliest to bloom (usually in May or June), right after [peonies](#). They are also the easiest to grow, as long as they are planted in well-draining soil, not waterlogged. They are the shortest type of lily (about 2 to 3 feet tall) and come in

heights are from one to six feet.

Intense breeding has erased much of the Asiatics' fragrance, but despite their lack of perfume, they are a favorite with floral arrangers.

- **Oriental lilies** (*Lilium* sp. - "Oriental hybrids") have that famously intoxicating fragrance. They are tall and stately (4 feet), and tend to grow more slowly. Oriental hybrids bloom in mid- to late summer, just when Asiatic lilies are beginning to fade. Orientals are always a striking choice, producing masses of huge white, pink, red, or bi-color blooms. They make wonderful cut flowers that fill even the largest rooms with spicy scents.
- **Easter lilies** (*Lilium longifolium*) are most commonly grown indoors as a holiday plant. As their name suggests, they are typically forced into bloom around Easter, in March or April. Outdoors, they are better suited for warmer regions of North America, where they can be planted in the garden after blooming has finished. These

autumn for winter protection). [Learn more about Easter Lilies.](#)

- **Trumpet lilies** (*Lilium* sp. - “Trumpet hybrids”) are similar to oriental lilies, producing many blooms with a nice scent. Their flowers tend to be smaller and more closed (like a trumpet) than those of the other lilies.

There are other lilies out there, of course, such as **tiger lilies** (*Lilium henryi*) and **Turk’s cap lilies** (*Lilium superbum*), as well as hybrids like “**Orienpet**” (Oriental + Trumpet) and “**LA**” lilies (Easter + Asiatic). Browse through your favorite online gardening retailer’s catalog to find what you like best!



*Lilies come in a range of bright, beautiful colors.*

#### Read Next

- [July Birth Flowers: Larkspurs and Water Lilies](#)
- [How to Grow Daylilies: The Complete Daylily Flower Guide](#)
- [50 Fall Flowers and Plants for Autumn!](#)

## PLANTING

Lilies need lots of sun. For dependable blooms, lilies should get 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight daily (aka “full sun”). If it’s too shady, the stems will attempt to lean toward the sun or get spindly and fall over.



bulb. How can you tell if your site drains well? After a good rain, find a spot that is the first to dry out. Enrich the soil with leaf mold, compost, or well-rotted manure to encourage good drainage. Learn more about [soil amendments](#) and [preparing soil for planting](#).

Most popular varieties prefer acidic to neutral soil, but some are lime-tolerant or prefer alkaline soils (e.g., Madonna lilies).

## When to Plant Lilies

Lilies are commonly planted in the fall but can be planted in the spring in areas with harsh winters.

- In the fall, plant at least four weeks before your first fall frost date. Bulbs planted in the autumn will have well-established roots in the spring. The bulbs benefit from a winter chill to produce big blooms.
- In the spring, plant them as soon as the threat of frost has passed.
- Container-grown lily plants can be planted anytime during the early summer.
- Buy the bulbs close to planting time. Because lily bulbs don't go dormant, they will deteriorate over time, so don't plan to buy bulbs in the fall and wait until spring to plant them.



## How to Plant Lilies

- Plant lilies three times as deep as the bulbs are high. The deep planting encourages the developing stem to send out roots to help stabilize the plant and perhaps eliminate the need for staking. Also, deep planting keeps lily bulbs cool when temperatures soar.
- Set the bulb in the hole pointy side up.
- Fill the hole with soil and tamp gently (Got critters? Bury the bulbs in wire cages to protect them from getting eaten).
- Space bulbs at a distance equal to three times the bulb's diameter (usually about 8 to 18 inches apart, depending on the variety).
- If space allows, plant lilies in groups of three to five for visual appeal; crowding leads to poor circulation and gray molding.
- Water thoroughly at the time of planting.

→ [See more tips on how to grow lilies.](#)

## GROWING

- During active growth, water the flowers freely, especially if rainfall is less than 1 inch per week.
- Keep lilies mulched so that their roots are cool. The mulch should feel moist but not wet. [Read more about mulching.](#)
- Apply a high-potassium liquid fertilizer every 2 weeks from planting until 6 weeks after flowering.
- Apply a thin layer of compost each spring, followed by a 2-inch layer of mulch.
- Stake tall lilies.
- Lilies do not bloom more than once per season, but you can remove the faded flowers so that the plants don't waste energy making seeds.
- After the lily blooms, you can also remove just the stem itself. However, do NOT remove leaves until they have died down and turned brown in the fall. It's very important not to cut back the leaves until the end of their season because they help provide nourishment to the bulb for next

- Before winter, add 4 to 6 inches of mulch, simply to delay the ground freeze and allow the roots to keep growing. Leave the mulch until spring, once the last hard frost has passed. See your local frost dates. See your local [frost dates](#).
  - If your region doesn't have snow cover, keep the soil moist in winter.
- When lily shoots grow through the mulch in the spring, start to remove it gradually.
- Divide plants every 3 to 4 years as new growth begins in the spring. Just lift the plants and divide the clumps. Replant the new bulbs, adding some [compost](#).



## Types

you can enjoy lilies all summer long by planting bulbs from different varieties.

**Asiatic lilies** are the earliest to bloom and the easiest to grow. With their upward-facing flowers, they bloom early to mid-summer. Hardy in Zones 4 to 9, Asiatic lilies come in pure white, pink, vivid yellow, orange, and red. Intense breeding has erased much of the Asiatics' fragrance, but despite their lack of perfume, they are a favorite with floral arrangers.

- **'Patricia's Pride'**: white flowers brushed with deep purple; about 32 inches tall; blooms in early to midsummer
- **'Gran Paradiso'**: large (4- to 5-inch) red flowers; 3 to 4 feet tall; hardy in Zones 3 to 8; blooms in early to midsummer

**Trumpet lilies** bloom mid-summer. Tall with trumpet-shaped flowers, they are hardy in Zones 5 to 9. Trumpet lilies grow many blooms (12 to 15 per stalk!) and have

- **'Album'**, aka regal lily: white flowers; up to 6 feet tall; blooms in midsummer
- **'Yellow Planet'**: extra-large, buttery yellow flowers; 4 feet tall; blooms in mid- to late summer



*Trumpet lilies bloom mid-summer, and their blooms are intensely fragrant. Just a few plants can perfume your entire garden.*

**Oriental hybrids** end the season, blooming in mid- to late summer, just when Asiatic lilies are beginning to fade. From tiny 2-footers to towering 8-foot-tall giants, Orientals are always a striking choice (the shorter ones are great for patio beds or container gardens). Adored for their intoxicating fragrance that intensifies after dark, Oriental lilies produce masses of huge white, pink, red, or bi-color blooms. They make wonderful cut flowers that will fill even the largest of

- **‘Black Beauty’**: dark red, 5-inch, funnel-shape flowers; 5 to 6 feet tall; blooms in mid- to late summer
- **‘Casa Blanca’**: white flowers; 3 to 4 feet tall; blooms in mid- to late summer
- **‘Stargazer’**: large, deep pink, white-edge flowers; 2 to 3 feet tall; blooms in mid- to late summer

**Native lilies** provide a range of options; here are a few:

- **Turk’s cap lily**: densely spotted orange flowers; 4 to 7 feet tall; blooms in midsummer
- **Canada lily**: yellow to orange-red flowers; 3 to 8 feet tall; blooms in late spring to midsummer
- **Wood lily**: North America’s most wide-ranging lily; orange, pink-to-red flowers; 1 to 3 feet tall; blooms in July and August

## HARVESTING

### Displaying Lilies in Vases



third of the stem. Taking more than that can reduce the plant's vigor and longevity since the plant needs its foliage to create energy.

- If you are growing lilies strictly for cut flowers, consider planting them in a designated cutting garden, where you can plant fresh bulbs each year.
- When cutting lilies, choose those with buds that are just about to open, with a bit of the flower color showing. The higher-up buds will open as the bottom ones fade.
- Just one lily stem in a vase can be a show-stopper.
- As soon as you get lilies inside, trim the stem ends an inch or so, making a diagonal cut with a sharp knife.
- If you worry that the orange pollen of lilies might cause stains, simply snip off the stamens in the flower's center.
- Before arranging in a vase, remove the lower leaves on the stems so that no foliage will be underwater.
- A good lily arrangement will last two or more weeks. Change the water ev-

- To help prolong the flowers' life, add cut-flower food to the water. Lilies require only half the amount of food recommended for other flowers.
- It's important to note that lilies are highly toxic to our feline friends. If you have cats, we do not recommend cutting lilies to bring inside because even the pollen can cause tragic consequences. Learn more about [Plants That Are Toxic to Cats, Dogs, and Other Pets](#).

## How to Save Your Easter Lilly

These stunning seasonal potted blooms can be enjoyed in the garden for years. Allow the flowers to fade and remove each in its turn. Set the pot in the sun and treat it as a houseplant, fertilizing when watering until the leaves are yellow. In mid-May, remove the bulb from its pot and plant it outdoors in a protected but sunny spot. New growth will soon emerge. Typically, during the first outdoor season, [Easter lilies](#) bloom in late September. In the ensuing years, they will

## GARDENING PRODUCTS



## PESTS/DISEASES

- **Gray mold** is sometimes a problem, especially in a wet, cool spring or summer. Make sure lilies are not crowded and have plenty of air circulation. Rot can also be a concern.
- Viruses, spread by **aphids**, may be troublesome, although some cultivars are virus-tolerant.
- **Red lily beetles**, **slugs**, and **snails** may occur.
- **Deer**, **rabbits**, **voles**, and **groundhogs**

buried wire cages to protect them from getting eaten.

## WIT AND WISDOM

- The name “lily” can be misleading because many other plants use it besides true lilies. Daylilies and water lilies aren’t lilies at all, and neither are lilies-of-the-valley or lilyturf. With so many other plants using the name “lily,” it seems that identity theft has existed since long before using computers and credit cards!
- Easter lilies can be planted in the ground in the spring. They may survive several years if you mulch them heavily in the fall, especially in northern regions. If they survive, they’ll bloom in late summer.
- In a flower bed, lilies prosper in the presence of low-growing plants that protect the lilies’ roots from drying out.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it's not surprising that she and The Old Farmer's Almanac found each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More from Catherine Boeckmann](#)

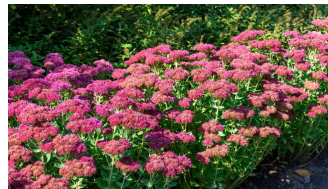
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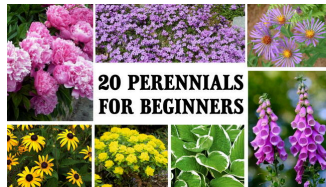
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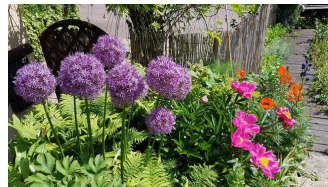
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## COMMENTS

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**Christine (not verified)** 9 months 1 week ago

Hi

I have little growths all along the old stalks of my lilies. What are they? My lillies last year grew to 2mtrs high!

Should I cut the stalks ?

Thank you

Christine

[REPLY](#)

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**The Editors** 9 months 1 week ago

Daylilies may develop seed pods on their stems after blooming. They are called “bulbils.” You can actually save these seeds! They’ll eventually turn brown or black. In nature, these bulbils drop to the ground and eventually grow into a flowering bulb. If left alone, the seedpods will just go to waste.

**REPLY**

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**Marianne Gadell (not verified)** 11 months ago

Gardner cuddle off my lily stem when it started to grow it was About Four or 5 inches the question is is it going to die the plant

**REPLY**

---

**Aline (not verified)** 1 year 9 months ago

Hi, the leaves on our white lilies are yellow and the buds are really small this year. Can you tell

[REPLY](#)

**The Editors** 1 year 9 months ago

Yellow leaves can be caused by various factors, such as over or underwatering, lack of nutrients, too much or too little light, or low humidity. Check for diseases and pests such as aphids, which can cause distortion of flower buds and yellowing leaves.

[REPLY](#)

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**Lisa (not verified)** 1 year 11 months ago

Please keep in mind that lillies are poisonous to cats! I had to take our cats to the animal hospital for overnight IV solution to wash out the toxins, otherwise they could go into kidney failure. I thought daylillies would be ok, but there have been concerns that these are toxic as well.

[REPLY](#)



**Jennifer Keating** 1 year 10 months ago  
Lisa-

This is so important to keep in mind, thank you for the reminder! Check out this article about [Plants That Are Toxic to Cats, Dogs, and Other Pets](#).

REPLY

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**Mary Morrison (not verified)** 2 years 6 months ago

I didn't find this question anywhere: I ordered lily bulbs and received them with sprouts. Should I go ahead and plant them even though they are trying to grow in the fall?

REPLY

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**Joe Bloomer (not verified)** 2 years 11 months ago

Got asian lilies as a gift. Blooms fell off 3 weeks ago. ? do I let it renew blooms w/o help or do I

**REPLY****The Editors** 2 years 10 months ago

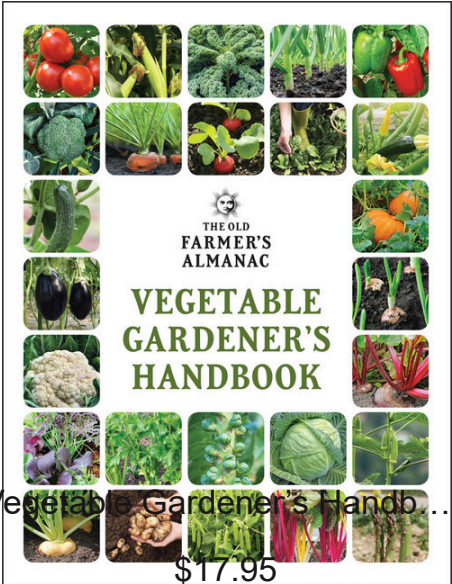
Joe, I think this is what you are looking for; this and more appears on this page above:

- Lilies do not bloom more than once per season, but you can remove the faded flowers so that the plants don't waste energy making seeds.
- After the lily blooms, you can also remove just the stem itself. However, do NOT remove leaves until they have died down and turned brown in fall. It's very important not to cut back the leaves until the end of their season because they help provide nourishment to the bulb for next season's blooms.
- Cut down the dead stalks in the late fall or early spring.

REPLY

MORE COMMENTS

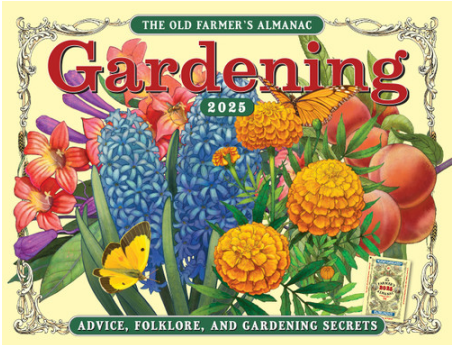
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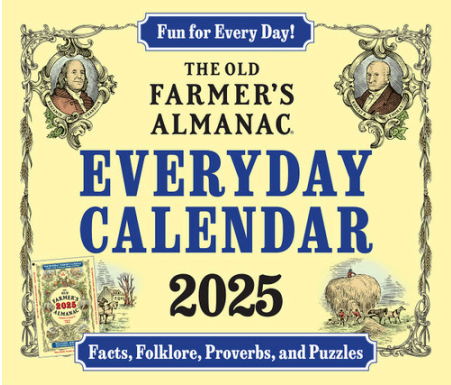
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