

Easter Lily



HOW TO MAKE YOUR EASTER LILIES KEEP ON GIVING

The Easter Lily, the traditional time-honored flower of Easter, is highly regarded as a joyful symbol of beauty, hope and life. The large, trumpet-shaped, fragrant white flowers make a meaningful gift that embodies the very essence of the celebration of Easter. Whether you plan to give the potted plants as a gift or use them to decorate your own home, the following tips will help make your Easter Lilies keep on giving.

Two of the greatest charms of the Easter Lily are form and fragrance, so look for high quality plants that are aesthetically pleasing from all angles. Select medium-to-compact plants that are well-balanced and proportional in size - not too tall and not too short.

For the longest possible period of enjoyment in your home, look for plants with flowers in various stages of ripeness. For example, the best selection would be a plant with just one or two open or partly open blooms, and three or more puffy, unopened buds of different sizes. The ripe puffy buds will open up within a few days, while the tighter ones will bloom over the next several days.

As the flowers mature, remove the yellow anthers before the pollen starts to shed. This gives longer flower life and prevents the pollen from staining the white flowers. When a mature flower starts to wither after its prime, cut it off to make the plant more attractive while you still enjoy the fresher, newly-opened blooms.

When selecting plants, be sure to also check out the foliage: an abundance of dark, rich green foliage is not only attractive, but a vital sign of good plant health. The foliage should appear dense and plentiful, all the way down to the soil line, a good indicator of an active, healthy root system.

Be wary of Easter Lilies displayed in paper, plastic or mesh sleeves. The protective sleeves are used for shipping and should be removed immediately upon arrival at the store. While the packaging may seem convenient, the quality of the plants will deteriorate if they are left sleeved too long. Also avoid waterlogged plants, especially if the plant looks wilted. This could be a sign of root rot.

In the home, Easter Lilies prefer moderately cool temperatures. Recommended daytime temperatures are 60° to 65° F. with slightly cooler night temperatures. Avoid placing plants near drafts, and avoid exposure to excess heat or dry air from appliances, fireplaces or heating ducts. The lily will thrive near a window in bright, indirect natural daylight, but avoid glaring, direct sunlight.

Easter Lilies prefer moderately moist, well-drained soil. Water the plant thoroughly when the soil surface feels dry to a light touch, but avoid over-watering. If the pot is wrapped in decorative foil, be careful not to let the plant sit in trapped, standing water. For best results, remove the plant from decorative pots or covers, take it over the sink and water thoroughly until water seeps

out of the pot's drain holes to completely saturate the soil. Allow the plant to air for a few minutes and discard the excess water before replacing it back into its decorative pot cover.

After the last bloom has withered and has been cut away, you can continue to grow your Easter Lilies, and even plant them outside in your garden to enjoy them for years to come. Once the lilies have finished flowering, place the potted plants in a sunny location. Continue to water thoroughly as needed, and add one teaspoon of slow-release Osmocote fertilizer every 6 weeks. You can move the pots to a sunny location outdoors after the danger of frost has passed.

To plant your Easter Lilies outside, prepare a well-drained garden bed in a sunny location with rich, organic matter. Use a well-drained planting mix, or a mix of one part soil, one part peat moss and one part perlite. Good drainage is the key for success with lilies. To ensure adequate drainage, raise the garden bed by adding good soil to the top of the bed, thus obtaining a deeper topsoil and a rise to the planting area.

Plant the Easter Lily bulbs 3 inches below ground level, and mound up an additional 3 inches of topsoil over the bulb. Plant bulbs at least 12 to 18 inches apart in a hole sufficiently deep so that the bulbs can be placed in it with the roots spread out and down, as they naturally grow. Spread the roots and work the prepared soil in around the bulbs and the roots, leaving no air pockets. Water in immediately and thoroughly after planting. Try not to allow the soil to heave or shift after planting.

As the original plants begin to die back, cut the stems back to the soil surface. New growth will soon emerge. The Easter Lilies, which were forced to bloom under controlled greenhouse conditions in March, bloom naturally in the summer. You may be rewarded with a second bloom later this summer, but most likely you will have to wait until next June or July to see your Easter Lilies bloom again.

Another planting tip to consider is that lilies like their roots in shade and their heads in the sun. Mulching helps conserve moisture in between waterings, keeps the soil cool and loose, and provides a fluffy, nutritious medium for the stem roots. Or, a more attractive alternative would be to plant a "living mulch," or a low ground cover of shallow-rooted, complementary annuals or perennials. The stately Easter Lilies rising above lacy violas or primulas is not only aesthetically pleasing, but also sound gardening.

The Easter Lily bulbs are surprisingly hardy even in cold climates. Just be sure to provide winter protection by mulching the ground with a thick, generous layer of straw, pine needles, leaves, ground corncob, pieces of boxes or bags. Carefully remove the mulch in the spring to allow new shoots to come up, as your Easter Lilies will keep on giving beauty, grace and fragrance in years to come.

Source: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/>