

Her Majesty – Genus *Lilium*

For many years *Lilium* was considered a difficult genus for the garden but in recent years hybridization has created a flower that is more showy, vigorous and easy to grow. Most new hybrids are resistant to the common virus that infected lilies in the past.

These majestic plants create excitement in the back of a mixed border or as a dramatic presentation in a bed all their own. The tall leafy stems range in height from one foot to ten feet and support variously shaped flowers which are borne singly or in racemes. Flowers range in size from one inch to one foot and scents range from delightful to disagreeable. Colors run the whole floral spectrum with the exception of a true blue.

The International Lily Register classifies lilies into the following nine divisions:

1. Asiatic hybrids
2. Martagon hybrids
3. Candidum hybrids
4. American hybrids
5. Longiflorum hybrids
6. Trumpet and Aurelian hybrids
7. Oriental hybrids
8. Other hybrids
9. All true species

There are three basic culture needs for lilies:

1. Deep, loose well-drained, fertile soil
2. Ample moisture – year round (lilies never have a true dormant period)
3. Coolness and shade at roots, sun or filtered sun for blooms

Lilies produce bulbs that are made up of loose scales. Buy firm, unshriveled bulbs. Regardless of season, plant bulbs as soon as practical after purchase. The depth of planting depends on the rooting habit of the variety. Stem rooting varieties produce roots just above the bulb and need deep planting. Basal rooting lilies need shallow planting. Plant bulbs one foot apart. If uncertain of the variety, plant the bulb shallow rather than deep. Lily roots are contractile and will gradually pull bulbs down to the correct depth.

Once actively growing, lilies must not be allowed to dry out. Water thoroughly and regularly during hot weather, avoiding overhead watering which can result in toppling and the spread of diseases. Place peat or compost

around stems to help maintain consistent moisture conditions. Occasional fertilizing will benefit almost all varieties.

Staking is advisable for those lilies which grow to over three feet in height. Avoid planting any lily in a windy location. Deadhead faded blooms, and after foliage has yellowed, cut stems to ground level. Apply fresh mulch for winter.

Division of lilies should be done when the clump becomes crowded or bloom quality declines – either in the spring or in the fall after the foliage has yellowed. If transplanting a lily clump without dividing it, do so at any time – even in full bloom. Dig carefully and transplant immediately.

It is so easy to find space in your garden for a few (more?) lilies. Give it a try!

References

Edinger, Philip, Susan Lang and the editors of Sunset books. *How to Grow Bulbs*. Menlo Park, Calif.: Sunset books, 1998.

Ellis, Barbara W. *Taylor Guide of Bulbs*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

Hessayon, D.G. *The Bulb Expert*. New York: Transworld Publishers, 1998.