

Growing and Caring for Easter Lilies- *Lilium longiflorum*

Easter lilies are sold as temporary houseplants in March and April, and people throw them away when they finish blooming. However, this lily makes a fabulous late-summer bloom in the garden. It fragrances an entire flower bed especially in the early morning and evening. You might find the Easter lily "too smelly" to be in the house, but in the garden it is just right.

Here is how to grow it out-of-doors: After Easter, and when the nights are over 50 degrees, break off the dead blooms but not any of the stalk or leaves.

- Take the plant from its pot, spread out the roots. (Roots are not capable of spreading themselves out, and you do not want a root ball for the lily.)
- Place the plant in well-drained soil, loosened to about a foot deep with lots of organic material or compost. The site should be in full sun but not hot West sun. Plant the lily at the same depth as it is in the pot.
- Mulch to keep the bulb cool. Or, plant it among shorter annuals or perennials that will shade the soil.
- Fertilize it with 5-10-5 fertilizer in early spring and when the flower buds form. The fertilizer has to have the middle number highest because phosphorous encourages bloom set. (NPK)
- The plant wants to be moist but not wet, which can cause disease and bulb rot. Water early in the day so the leaves dry out and do not get mildewed. The plants can be susceptible to viral infections and fungal rot but is generally hardier than other lilies.
- The bloom stalk can grow to be about 3 feet tall and may need to be staked.
- Avoid using pre-emergent herbicides, which will suppress root growth. Pull weeds by hand since roots are shallow and will be damaged with a hoe or a shovel.
- The plant may die back to the ground. It will be back the following spring. It may continue growing, and I have had them re-bloom the first September after moving them outside. The plants multiply. Mulch them with about 8 inches of straw in November. The plant is from Japan and hardy for our area.

I grew an Easter Lily from seed I collected in 1995 in Western Australia where they grow wild. Some years it is as tall as eight feet. It has 12-15 flowers on a single stalk. It took three years to grow from seed to flower. Sadly, the bulb has never multiplied, but it has bloomed reliably for 10 years.