



# Growing Garden Lilies

## Introducing the lily

Several different plant species are commonly referred to as lilies. However, daylily, calla lily, toad lily, and surprise lily are not true lilies. True lilies are members of the genus *Lilium*. They originate from underground bulbs and produce large, showy blossoms in summer.

True lilies are excellent plants for almost any garden situation. They are versatile and durable, and they provide gardeners with a wide variety of plant heights, flower forms, and colors. In fact, their presence in the garden is so striking they are often called the “Queen” or “Grande Dame” of the summer garden.

## Growing garden lilies

Lilies prefer well-drained, slightly acidic (pH 6.0-7.0) soils high in organic matter. Bulbs are normally planted in the fall at a depth of three times the height of the bulb, about 6-8 inches deep. Container-grown lilies can also be planted in spring and summer. Bulbs of containerized lilies should be planted at the same depth in the garden as they were originally planted in the container. In heavy, clay soils, plant them slightly higher. Lilies perform poorly in wet soils or soils that do not drain well.

Full sun to light shade is best for most lilies with the exception of the Turk's cap lily, which prefers partial shade. Mulching is recommended as it keeps the soil cool, conserves moisture, and prevents weed competition.

## Types of garden lilies

Several types of lilies are commonly grown in Midwestern landscapes. Some types like the Asiatic and Oriental lilies are easy to find at garden centers and other retailers. The

Turk's cap lily may be more difficult to find, but is worth the effort. Hybrids between some of these species have created a mix of flower colors, fragrance, and heights—gardeners are sure to find one that works well in their landscape. By planting bulbs from each of the different types, lilies can be in bloom for most of the summer.

## Asiatic lilies

Asiatic lilies are probably the most popular landscape or garden lily. Their upward or outward facing flowers are available in the widest range of colors and are frequently “freckled” with dark spots. Flowers are available in bright and pastel shades of almost every color except blue. Asiatic lilies are among the first lilies to bloom in the garden, many blooming by early to mid-June. These lilies are often considered the most durable of the lilies and multiply quickly. Their only drawback is a lack of fragrance compared to other lily types. Asiatic lilies are available in a wide range of heights (1-5 feet) making them suitable for the back, middle, or front of a landscaping border. The dwarf types are useful in container plantings.



## Oriental lilies

For fragrance and bloom size, Oriental lilies always win. Sweetly scented blooms are produced in mid to late summer, as the Asiatic group is finishing. Cultivars such as ‘Stargazer’ and ‘Casa Blanca’ have become popular cut



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flowers because of their elegant and heavily scented blooms. They are available in shades of white, pink, crimson, and pale yellow. The open, reflexed petals can be spotted, brushed, or edged with darker or contrasting colors. Oriental cultivars are often taller than the Asiatic types, reaching 3-6 feet. They perform best when protected from the hot afternoon sun and strong winds.

### Trumpet lilies

Trumpet lilies bloom about the same time as Oriental lilies. Trumpet lilies are noted for their spotless, fused petals. Their fused petals resemble a trumpet, hence the common name. The highly fragrant, outward-facing flowers are available primarily in white, yellow, and pale pink. They are excellent cut flowers because of their long vase life. Trumpet lilies range from 3-8 feet tall and prefer protection from strong winds.



The Easter lily (*Lilium longiflorum*) is a trumpet-type lily. Greenhouse growers force bulbs into bloom for Easter. Afterward, Easter lilies can be planted in the garden. When planted outdoors they bloom in mid-summer and are often short-lived.

### Species lilies

There are several lily species that make excellent additions to the garden or landscape. While most have smaller flowers than those already mentioned, many produce more flowers per cluster. One lily species not to be overlooked is the Martagon or Turk's cap lily. The waxy flowers are smaller than other lilies and are available in mauve, pink, burgundy, yellow-orange, yellow, and white. The flowers are often spotted or freckled. The petals of the downward-facing flowers are strongly reflexed, creating a turban-like appearance, hence the name "Turk's cap." A woodland



native, this is one of the few lilies that tolerates part shade and still performs beautifully. Height ranges from 4-7 feet making plants suitable for the middle or back of the garden border. Bulbs are best planted in the fall.

### Hybrid lilies

In the past 10-20 years, several hybrids have been developed between some of the previously mentioned species and cultivars. By combining some of the best features from multiple lily groups, these new hybrids are quickly becoming popular with home gardeners.

**LA hybrids** are crosses between *Lilium longiflorum* (Easter lily) and Asiatic lilies. The LA hybrids are noted for their large (4-7 inch), slightly trumpet-shaped flowers. The trumpet lily parentage brings longer vase life while the Asiatic parentage brings more intensely colored flowers (yellow, red, orange, peach, pink, violet, and white). This series of hybrids is usually 3-5 feet tall and generally has little to no flower fragrance.

**Orienpet hybrids** are crosses between Oriental and trumpet lilies. Orienpet flowers are massive, approaching 10 inches, on 2-4 foot-tall plants. Flowers are upward or outward facing in shades of pink, yellow, red, orange, and white. Almost all cultivars are heavily scented.



### Enjoying lilies as cut flowers

In addition to being outstanding garden performers, lilies make excellent cut flowers with a long vase life. When cutting flowers to enjoy indoors, be sure to leave at least half to two-thirds of the stem and foliage to supply food to the bulb. This helps insure abundant blooms next year. Before bringing cut lilies indoors, remove the golden to rust-colored pollen structures or anthers. Lilies produce large quantities of pollen which can stain clothing and other materials.

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