

Selecting Lilies for Your Garden

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Lilies are an easy-to-grow, colorful addition to your garden, flowering from mid-June through mid-September. These hardy bulbs require only minimal care and will grow into an attractive group of flowering stems.

What Are True Lilies?

Many plants that have lily as part of their name (such as daylily) are not true lilies. True lilies belong to the genus *Lilium*. They grow from bulbs made of fleshy, overlapping scales without a protective covering. True lilies have stiff stems with narrow strap-like leaves all along them. Flowers are large and showy, and may be bowl-shaped, trumpet-shaped, or bell-shaped with petals curled back. Lilies offer gardeners a great variety in flower form and color.

Deciding Which Lilies to Plant

Asiatic and Oriental lilies are presently the most popular types of garden lilies. Asiatics are among the easiest to grow because they are very hardy and do not need to be staked. Their flowers are large and colorful. Oriental lilies have become increasingly popular and can be grown successfully in much of Minnesota if the soil is acidic and drains well. They are dramatically beautiful with fragrant, exotic flowers.

Many other lilies and species are available, but not all of them will grow in Minnesota — look for lilies hardy to at least USDA zone 4. For example, Easter lilies, so popular as flowering pot plants, are not reliably hardy in Minnesota winters, although some dedicated gardeners make the special efforts necessary to help them survive and bloom each August. For local lily expertise, join a group such as the North Star Lily Society of Minnesota to share cultural information and lists of cultivars recommended by expert lily growers.

When choosing your lilies, you should also consider the color scheme of your garden and blooming season of the lilies. Visit a private or public garden such as the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum to see lilies in bloom and help you decide which ones you like.

Where, When and How to Plant Your Lilies

Lilies grow best in well-drained soil. Add organic matter to heavy clay or sandy soils before planting. Lilies should never be planted where there is standing water; therefore, raised beds are excellent sites for lily plants. Freestanding containers, however, may experience temperature extremes that are too severe. Asiatic and Oriental lilies grow best in full sunlight. In Minnesota, they need a minimum of 8 hours each day to bloom well.



Enchantment Asiatic lily

Lilies are usually planted from mid-September through October, but you can also plant them in spring. Select firm, plump bulbs with roots attached. You should plant lily bulbs as soon as possible because they are never completely dormant and must not dry out before planting. For best effect, plant a single type of lily in groups of three to five bulbs. Space bulbs 8-12 inches apart, with groups 3-5 feet apart, depending on the vigor and size of the lilies. Plant small lily bulbs 2-4 inches deep and large bulbs 4-6 inches deep from the top of the bulb.

Before winter, mulch the newly planted bulbs with 4-6 inches of loose, weed-free compost, leaves or wood chips to delay soil freezing and allow roots to grow deeper into the soil. By insulating the soil against changing temperatures, you delay the emergence of frost-tender shoots in the spring.

Recommended Lily Cultivars for Minnesota

Cultivars	Type	Color	Height in Feet	Time of Bloom
Enchantment	Asiatic	orange	2-3	June
Connecticut King	Asiatic	yellow	3-4	June
Corsica	Asiatic	pink	3	June/July
Crete	Asiatic	deep pink	3-4	June/July
Dawn Star	Asiatic	cream	2-3	July
Black Beauty	Oriental	dark red	5-6	July/August
Journey's End	Oriental	deep pink	4-5	August
Stargazer	Oriental	crimson-red	2-3	August
Yellow Ribbons	Oriental	white/yellow	3-5	August
Casa Blanca	Oriental	pure white	4-5	August/September

Hardy established roots do not need winter protection where snow cover is dependable. Otherwise, a winter mulch is helpful, but should be applied after the ground begins to freeze.

Caring for Your Lilies

Leave the mulch in place until the danger of hard frost, which can damage the shoots and kill the flower buds of some tender lilies, has passed. If lily shoots grow through the covering, remove the mulch, but leave it nearby so you can cover them if a hard frost is predicted.

Fertilize in spring with a phosphorus-rich formula such as 5-10-10 (the second number should exceed the first). Slow-release fertilizers work well. Always follow label instructions when applying fertilizer.

Lilies usually have few pests, but rabbits and slugs can be a menace to emerging shoots. Small sucking insects called aphids can also cause problems for flower buds. Carefully wash the affected plants off with a garden hose to remove aphids. Botrytis blight, a fungal

disease, causes reddish-brown leaf spots and is often the result of damp weather and/or evening watering. A sunny location and careful watering that avoids wetting the foliage will help reduce fungal diseases.

Remove old flowers on the plants by carefully breaking them off. Do not remove foliage; green stems and leaves will continue to feed the bulb until fall.

Remove old foliage in early spring by cutting down the dead stalks.

For Further Information

Jefferson-Brown, Michael. *The Lily: For Garden, Patio and Display*. North Pomfret: David & Charles, 1988.

Mathew, Brian. *Lilies: A Romantic History with a Guide to Cultivation*. Philadelphia: Running Press, 1993.

Matthews, Victoria. *Lilies*. Collingridge Books in assoc. with Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, 1989.

For information on the North American Lily Society and the North Star Lily Society of Minnesota, or for help in finding a specific cultivar or species, contact the Anderson Horticultural Library at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum in Chanhassen, Minnesota, by calling 612/443-2440.

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