

Growing and Showing Lilies

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Lilies can be obtained and grown from three different approaches.

Bulbs

Most lily lovers, growers get their first plants from **bulbs**. These are usually purchased at shopping centers or plant stores. These are limited in their selections and in many cases have been out of cold storage for some time and as a result are desiccated or dried out. It is a gamble with these ones. I may tell you how you can salvage one of these later. However it is best to obtain bulbs from the regional bulb sales or from a local grower in your area. This way the bulbs are firm fresh and a good selection can be purchased.

Seed

Growing from **seed** is relatively easy but only species come true to form and it takes from two to eight years to bloom time.

Bulbils

Growing from **bulbils** is another way to grow lilies true to type but you also need some friendly sharing lily friends who have some to share. Belonging to a local lily society is a good source for that.

Having now procured your bulbs you now need to plant them out. The first thing is to choose the site. Most lilies like a sunny position although some do well in partial shade. They also like the classic conditions of a free draining, moisture retentive soil. Free drainage means that any excessive water will drain away leaving sufficient moisture usually held in the humus to supply the plant. Do not plant where wet conditions prevail or where there is no drainage or else... Rot-t-t.

Heavy soils can be lightened by adding grit or sand and humus, either well rotted manure or good compost. A dry soil should have organic material added. The acidity of the soil for most lilies should be about ph7 or near neutral. You can amend your for orientals to be more acidity by adding peat moss or pine needles and for the Caucasian lilies you can give them a little lime. A loose humusy lily bed laced with a balanced fertilizer and a sprinkle of bone meal will provide you with good robust stems that you will just want to show.

Entering lilies in shows or exhibiting adds zest to the enjoyment of growing them. Even in a non-competitive show, it is fun to exhibit fine specimens just to show what can be done and to encourage others to take up this challenging and rewarding hobby. In competitive shows, of course, there is the added incentive of award ribbons, trophies and satisfaction of comparing one's own successes with those of other growers. Competitive shows turns lily growing into a sport. One cannot really tell let alone demonstrate just how good one is as a grower until some of his specimens are compared with those of friends and adjudicated by experienced lily judges.

But there is more to the game than growing good lilies. They have to be cut at the proper stage and transported to the show. There they have to be placed in containers; groomed and entered. Price winning specimens can be over looked because the exhibitor failed to present them to the best advantage. Likewise, less than perfect entries can be upgraded by careful attention to these details which improve the appearance of a specimen.

The average lily grower is confronted with the problem of not only what to cut but where to cut the stems. If one cuts the stem too close to the ground, there will be no leaves left to renew the bulb for next year's growth. If one cuts it too high, the stem will not be in good proportion to the inflorescence. In order to insure a good stock for next year, leave at least one-third of the foliage on the plant. Most exhibitors living near the show cut their entries after the first flowers have opened and bring them to the show in containers of water. Great care must be taken to make sure the blooms are not crushed, bruised or broken. Ideally the Pic-a-pop containers using every other opening will usually provide a good way of transporting. Cutting in the late afternoon when the floral parts are dry will prevent or reduce pollen stains on leaves of stems having fully opened flowers. Stems can also

be cut when the buds are about to open and stored in a cool, dark place between 34 and 40 degrees and can be kept several days prior to the show. If you are travelling long distances to a show, it is possible to pack the cut stems in flower boxes without water. Line the boxes with sheets of polyethylene to keep them from drying out. Stems with the first buds due to open the following day are cut, stripped of their lower leaves, wilted down moderately so that the buds will hang limply and not get broken and transported in as cool a condition as possible. When they arrive, cut two or three inches off the stem and put them into plenty of warm water. They will plump up in a few hours, the flowers opening and assuming the natural poses in arrangement.