

Easter Lilies Can Keep on Giving in the Landscape

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY William M. Johnson

The white trumpet-shaped flowers of the Easter Lily have become the traditional time-honored symbol of beauty, hope and life during the Easter season. Potted flowering Easter Lilies can be planted in the landscape now and will produce blooms next summer.

Over the years I have become an ardent admirer of blooming bulbs of all types. Bulbs are easy to plant and care for and suitable for beds or containers. It's hard to believe that so much beauty can come from such humble origins.

The newest blooming bulb addition in my landscape is the Easter Lily. The source of my Easter Lily was from a potted

specimen I received last spring — I was not about to discard such a beautiful plant at the end of its bloom cycle.

Lilium longiflorum is the botanical name for Easter Lilies and they do not bloom during Easter under natural growing conditions. Greenhouse growers pot up the bulbs in fall and force them into bloom for the holiday.

Part of the challenge in producing Easter Lilies for Easter is that the Easter Holiday does not fall on the same day each year. Easter is the first Sunday following a full moon, on or after the vernal equinox (March 21). Therefore, Easter Lily production schedules are slightly different each year.

The primary method for forcing flower produc-



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Dr. William Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

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tion is known as vernalization (a cold, moist treatment to the bulb for a defined time period). After bulbs are subjected to this treatment, growth is forced under greenhouse growing conditions.

I get questions this time of year about the feasibility of planting Easter Lilies in the home landscape after the holiday season is over. You can plant your Easter Lilies outdoors after the holiday. Pinch off flowers as they fade but don't cut the foliage.

Indeed, after the last flower has withered and has been cut away, a potted Easter Lily can then be planted in the landscape. Do not remove the green foliage as it is needed to help reinvigorate the bulb for next year's flower.

Prepare a well-drained garden bed in a sunny location amended with organic matter such as compost. Good drainage is a major key for success with lilies.

To ensure adequate drainage, create a raised garden bed by moving soil to the top a few inches higher than the surrounding soil level. Plant the Easter Lily bulbs 6 inches deep from the base of the bulb to the top of the mulched surface, assuming at least a 2-inch layer of mulch.

Plant bulbs 4-to-6 inches apart. The planting hole should be wide enough so the roots can be easily spread out. Work the soil in around the roots, and water them immediately after

planting.

Easter Lilies like their "feet in the shade and their heads in the sun." Mulch with a 2-inch layer of compost or shredded pine bark. This helps conserve moisture in between waterings, suppresses weed growth, keeps the soil cool and provides nutrients as it decays.

As the leaves and stems of the original plants begin to turn brown and die back, cut them back just above a healthy leaf on the stem. Wait until the leaves and stems have turned brown before removing them. New growth will soon emerge. It is unlikely that a second flowering will occur later in the summer. Easter Lilies, which were forced to flower under controlled greenhouse conditions, will flower naturally in June or July the following and subsequent years and will reach a height of 3 feet or more.

During the winter months, maintain a generous layer of mulch. Carefully remove the mulch in the spring to allow new shoots to come up. Apply a slow-release fertilizer during the growing season when new shoots emerge in the spring. Apply the fertilizer to the soil around each plant about 2 inches from the stem and water it in. I can report that I practice what I preach. There are now six Easter Lilies in my landscape that I planted last spring from a potted specimen. While all six plants

have multiple flower buds, the most robust Easter Lily plant has 12 flower buds (yes, I counted them) and I expect them to open within the next couple of weeks.

While it's wonderful to see these beautiful flowers adorning the interiors of homes and churches this time of the year, it is also nice to know that they can become long-lived, reliable spring flowering bulbs for Gulf Coast landscapes.

At a Glance . . . Spring Pecan Field Day

SUBJECT: Spring Pecan Field Day

DATE: Thursday, April 17

TIME: 4:00 - 5:30 p.m.

PLACE: The North Pavilion in Carbide Park (4102-B Main, La Marque)

TOPICS: Hands-on pecan grafting demonstrations will be provided. Several varieties of pecan graftwood (\$1 per stick) will be available.

PRE-REGISTRATION: Pre-registration is not necessary for this program. E-mail (GALV3@wt.net) or phone (281-534-3413, ext. 12) for more information.