

Easter lilies can keep on giving in landscape

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

Have you given thought to the association that certain plants have with certain holidays?

Poinsettias are associated with Christmas, roses are associated with Valentine's Day, and lilies are associated with Easter. If you have a potted Easter lily that's still in the home, have you given thought to finding a place for them in your home garden?

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 the 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 production 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. After be-



PHOTO BY Dr. 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.

coming established in a landscape during the first-year growth, Easter lilies typically flower during the early summer season (June and July) in our growing area.

Indeed, after the last flower has withered and has been cut away, a potted Easter lily can be planted in the landscape. 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 sur-

face, 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 easily can be 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.



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Wait until the leaves and stems have turned brown before removing them. New growth soon will emerge. It is unlikely a second flowering will occur later in the summer.

Easter lilies, which were forced to flower under controlled greenhouse conditions in March, 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.

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Gardener's Q&A

Q: What would you suggest in dealing with suckers that emerge under oak trees from the roots? My neighbor recommended using a herbicide. Could this be harmful to the tree?

A: You will have to tolerate the suckers since the more you cut them, the more they appear to multiply.

Some homeowners keep them trimmed at a certain height and interplant with a camouflaging ground cover such as Asiatic jasmine to help conceal oak sprouts since the foliage is similar.

Do not apply a herbicide to sprouts since they are connected directly to the mother tree. A herbicide likely will do little more than defoliate the sprouts and could harm the tree to which they are attached.

