



## THE GENUS LILIUM: ELEGANCE & BEAUTY FOR THE GARDEN

The garden lilies (genus *Lilium*) intrigue the expert as well as the novice gardener. The history, divisions, classifications, hybridization and propagation can keep any “plant techie” happy for hours, while the striking, stately plants are a beginning gardener’s dream.

Garden lilies grow from a bulb. Bare bulbs are best acquired in the fall or spring while they are semi-dormant, but potted plants are readily available and can be planted anytime during the gardening season.

Gardeners in the Chicago area can choose from several types of lilies that are dependably hardy, provided that they are grown in a well-drained soil. Garden lilies do not tolerate “wet feet.” Most prefer full sun to part shade.

*Asiatic hybrids* are one of the most widely known cut flowers. Their blossoms may be up-facing, out-facing or down-facing. They are among the earliest to bloom and the easiest of lilies to grow.



*Oriental hybrids* are larger and often more showy in hot pinks and reds. Their flowers may be trumpet, bowl-shaped or flat-faced.

*Trumpet hybrids* have large trumpet-shaped flowers and grow up to five feet tall.

*OT hybrids*, also known as *Orienpets* are a cross between Orientals and Trumpets. They exhibit extreme vigor and disease resistance and can grow to seven and eight feet high. The Orientals and trumpets are famous for their fragrance.

Easter Lilies (*L. longiflorum*) are **not** hardy here, but LA hybrids, a cross between the Easter Lily and Asiatic lilies, combine the fragrance and beauty of both parents with the hardiness of the Asiatic. They have large, long-lasting flowers and strong stems. LA hybrids are a good choice for naturalizing.

*Species* include Meadow Lily (*L. candense*), the Turk’s Cap (*L. pumilum*) and Regal lilies (*L. regale*). The Turk’s Cap “Turk’s cap” flowers that nod from the tops of stems) and its hybrids are very winter hardy and grow well in woodland situations. Its flowers are orange to scarlet. The Regal Lily (*L. regale*) is

widely grown for its large, wonderfully scented trumpet flowers.

**Asiatic hybrids** include some of the most popular and dependable garden varieties. They are winter hardy well into Canada. Varieties are available in all shades of white, pink, lavender, red, yellow and orange. Some have spots and brush marks, adding contrast to the blooms.

- ‘America’ is a tall variety, growing up to 40-45 inches in the Chicago area. It bears unusual dark reddish flowers in June and July.
- ‘Connecticut King’ is an old-time favorite with large yellow flowers. It grows 36-40 inches tall.
- ‘Mount Duckling’ and ‘Mount Dragon’ are unusually short varieties, suitable for the front of the border at a mere 18 inches tall. ‘Mount Dragon’ bears deep orange flowers, while ‘Mount Duckling’ has vivid pink flowers, both flowering in July.
- ‘Reinesse’, another relatively diminutive variety, bears white flowers in June on 18 to 24-inch stems.
- ‘Vermeer’ has striking pink flowers with white centers and speckles that appear in July on 38-inch stems.

**Oriental hybrids** are very fragrant, usually with large flowers that are often bowl-shaped.

- 'Acapulco' has a deep rose, upward facing flowers with wavy petals and grows 30-40 inches tall. It flowers in July.

- 'Black Beauty' was the first lily chosen for the North American Lily Society's Hall of Fame. It bears striking, deep maroon flowers with deeply recurved petals and grows approximately 48 inches tall.

- 'Casa Blanca' is a classic white with large, horizontally held flowers, also chosen for the North American Lily Society's Hall of Fame. It is an early-flowering variety that grows 30-42 inches tall.

- 'Le Reve' ('Joy') boasts soft pink, upward facing flowers with a sweet fragrance. It is mid-season and grows 20-30 inches tall.

- 'Mona Lisa' has sideways-facing pastel pink flowers. It is a late-flowering variety that grows 18-24 inches tall.

- 'Star Gazer' is one of the most fragrant and popular varieties available. The upward-facing, carmine-pink flowers have darker spots and bright white petal edges. It flowers in July and grows 18-28 inches tall.

**LA hybrids** are a good choice for naturalized plantings.



- 'Dani Afrin' grows to 30 inches with large pink flowers.

- 'Nomade' is a taller variety at 44 inches. Its flowers are a blend of deeper pink with a hint of gold at the center.

- 'Royal Fantasy' bears beautiful soft yellow flowers in July. It grows to 32 inches.

**OT hybrids** are also known as Orienpets. These hybrids combine the beautiful flower shape and color of the Orientals with the ruggedness and dependability of trumpets and Aurelians.

- 'Red Dutch' has large, very fragrant yellow flowers with red centers. It grows to 48 inches.

- 'Zagora' is even taller at 52 inches. Its flowers are bronze with a reddish center.

**Species lilies** are a good choice

for later flowering. The deep pink flowers of *L. speciosum* 'Uchida' and the orange flowers of the Tiger Lily (*L. tigrinum*) appear in August, as do the yellow flowers of the Meadow Lily (*L. canadense*).

A good rule of thumb when planting dormant lily bulbs is to plant 2-3 times deeper than the height of the bulb and water in. The bulb roots will actually pull the lily somewhat deeper if needed, slightly "self adjusting"

for depth. Raised beds promote good drainage, as bulbs will rot in cold wet soil. Winter mulch is beneficial but should be removed in spring before the new shoots emerge. A summer mulch will help keep the soil cool and moist (not wet) around the plant roots.

Cut off spent flower heads just below the bottom blooms if you are not hybridizing or propagating, as the developing seedpods can take energy away from the bulb. Division is not usually needed. Lilies can be propagated by planting the small bulbils that sometimes appear along the stems.

By combining different varieties, a lily garden can be in bloom from early summer to early autumn. Lilies make perfect companions for other perennials and annuals in the border.