

Asiatic and Oriental Lilies

By Susan Camp

Who isn't looking for garden plants that require minimal care, bloom prolifically, are non-invasive, and are deer-resistant? I will try a fussy plant in the garden for a season or two, but if it doesn't perform, it will find itself moved to a less conspicuous corner.

When my husband suggested planting Asiatic lily bulbs two years ago, I was skeptical. I had never grown lilies, because I thought they would require too much care, and I had no intention of dancing attendance to plants that produced just a few blossoms during a short growing season. We planted several varieties, and, I am happy to say, have been rewarded with beautiful, healthy blooms of red, yellow, and peach.

Asiatic and Oriental lilies are hybrids of the genus *Lilium* and are true lilies, unlike daylilies (*Hemerocallis* spp.) and lily-of-the-valley (*Convallaria majalis*). Native to Asia and Japan, respectively, the showy flowers are popular additions to North American gardens. They will thrive in USDA Hardiness Zones 4 through 8.

Asiatic and Oriental lilies are easy to grow in full sun to part shade, requiring at least six hours of sunlight each day. They need moist, rich, well-drained soil with a covering of mulch to prevent the roots from drying out. For best effect, plant in groups of three to five. Petal colors include shades of yellow, orange, pink, red, white, and bicolored.

Asiatic lilies reach heights of 1 to 6 feet and are best planted at the back of a border with smaller plants surrounding them to shade the ground over their roots. They bloom in June and July. Asiatic lilies work well as container plants, and although they lack fragrance, the showy flowers with narrow, glossy, green leaves make excellent cut flowers.

The lack of fragrance distinguishes Asiatic from Oriental lilies, which have an intense, exotic scent. Oriental lilies can grow up to 8 feet tall and bear huge, ruffled blooms with deep green leaves. Oriental lilies bloom in mid- to late summer after the Asiatic lilies are finished.

Plant the bulbs of both lily hybrids in the fall. Most varieties prefer acidic to neutral soil. Work the soil to a depth of at least 10 inches, which will encourage the development of deep roots for stabilization of the plant. Add organic matter to the soil and plant the bulbs pointed end up two to three times as deep as the height of the bulbs. Space the bulbs 8 to 18 inches apart.

Keep the bulbs moist, but not wet, even in winter. Add compost and mulch each spring. You may need to stake tall varieties, especially if they are growing in shady areas. Too little sunlight causes weak, floppy stalks to develop. After the blooms have faded, remove them to prevent the plant from setting seed. Leave the stalks as well until late fall or early spring, so the plant can use the energy stored in them to produce flowers the next year.

Lilies need to be divided and transplanted in late September or early October every 2 to 3 years. Leave the plants intact until just before the first predicted frost, around November 1st to November 10th in Gloucester. To divide lilies, cut the stalks back to several inches and lift the bulb clump carefully with a spading fork. Separate the baby bulblets from the mother, which

should be planted 5 to 6 inches deep. Plant the babies about 2 inches deep and cover all transplanted bulbs with mulch to keep them moist.

Insect pests include aphids, which carry lily mosaic virus, an incurable disease. Bulb rot can occur with poor drainage.

Asiatic and Oriental lilies fulfill my requirements for unfussy plants that provide beautiful blooms and don't crowd out other plants, but are they deer-resistant? Unfortunately, the answer is "No." Voles and rabbits enjoy munching on lilies, too. Still, three out of four isn't bad.

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