

GROWING LILIES

by Sue McDavid

UCCE / El Dorado County Master Gardener

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Lilies bring beauty, color and fragrance to the garden, with their only requirements being well-drained soil and sun exposure for at least half a day. Lilies actually love full sun, as long as the bulbs are planted deeply enough to stay cool when the temperature is high. If lilies are located where it is too shady, their stems will lean toward the sun.

True lilies (members of the genus *Lilium*) bloom on a single stem with grass-like foliage. Lily bulbs have fleshy scales arranged in the manner of a garlic bulb and unlike those of daffodils, lily bulbs never go dormant. There are several classifications of lilies including Asiatic (early flowering, but lack the fragrance of other lilies), Trumpet (flowering in July and August with many being fragrant) and Oriental (the most fragrant lily and late blooming).

Planting lily bulbs can be done in the spring or fall – just make sure they are planted as soon as possible since they never go dormant. The most important consideration in planting is to make sure the soil drains well; lily bulbs do not like sitting in water and raised beds are ideal. Normal planting depth is twice the diameter of the bulb, but if planted in too shallow of a hole, a lily bulb's contractile roots will pull it down to the correct level. Due to the hot summers here, a mulch of two to four inches deep will maintain the soil at a cooler temperature. If no rain is predicted, water them well when first planted.

When lily stems emerge in the spring, a complete fertilizer (such as a 5-10-10 combination) can be lightly scratched in around them. Since lily bulbs never go dormant, they need constant moisture, and drip irrigation is preferred. Overhead sprinkling promotes fungal diseases and should be avoided.

Lilies make beautiful cut flowers in a vase, but do not cut off more than half the stem because the foliage is needed for the following year's bulb growth. Spent flowers should be removed as they dwindle and when the stem turns brown, it may be cut back to the ground. Some taller varieties of lilies may need to be staked and this can be done when the bulb is planted so it is not damaged later.

Lilies are generally fairly pest and disease free, although aphids can sometimes be a problem. Spray them off with water as soon as they appear. Moles do not eat lily bulbs, as they are after worms and grubs, but gophers do – thwart them by planting lily bulbs in wire baskets. Botrytis blight is a fungal disease of lilies that is seldom a problem in this area unless a lot of overhead watering is done.

Lilies come in many different colors and the only difficult aspect of planting them in the garden is which color to choose. Choose one or two or several, but whatever choice is made, lilies will continue to bring beauty to the garden year after year.

This Saturday, May 14, UCCE Master Gardeners will present a class on “Salsa Gardening.” The class is held in the Veterans Memorial Building at 130 Placerville Dr. in Placerville and starts at 9:00 a.m. The class is offered free of charge. The Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. Walk-ins are welcome. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Gardener/.