



Flower of Easter
By Barbara Schuchart
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What a perfect flower for the Easter season. The most common variety of Easter lilies (*Lillium Longiflorum*) has large, white, trumpet-shaped flowers with a wonderful fragrance. They have become a cherished tradition for many families, and they make a perfect gift or decoration for a home.

The Easter Lily is actually a native plant of the southern islands of Japan. We can thank Louis Houghton, a World War I soldier who in 1919 brought a suitcase full of the bulbs with him to the southern coast of Oregon. He gave them away to his family and friends to plant.

Today, there are ten growers located along the California-Oregon border in a narrow coastal region, from Smith River, Calif. to Brookings, Oregon. This area is called the Easter Lily Capital of the World, and ninety-five percent of all bulbs for the Easter Lily are produced there. The bulbs are harvested in the fall and then shipped to commercial greenhouses in the United States and Canada. Then they are planted in pots and forced under controlled conditions to bloom for Easter.

What should you look for when buying an Easter Lily? Look for plants in various stages of bloom, from buds to opened or partially-opened flowers. The foliage should be rich, dark green in color and appear dense and plentiful all the way down to the soil line, which is a good indication of a healthy root system. Look for a well-proportioned plant, about two times as high as the pot.

As the Easter Lily matures, remove the yellow anthers before the pollen starts to shed. This gives the flower longer life and prevents the pollen from staining the white flowers. Be sure to cut off any mature flowers that start to wither. Also be sure to check the plant for insects and disease; some signs of disease would be dark spots, crinkling or wilting.

Easter Lilies prefer daytime temperatures of about 60-65 degrees. They like to be near windows with bright indirect natural light. Keep them away from drafts and drying heat sources. Do not overwater, as lilies like moderately moist, well drained soil. If the plant is wrapped in decorative foil, be sure water is not accumulating under the pot. More plants die from over-watering than under watering.

An important note is that Easter Lilies are highly toxic to cats; a cat doesn't even have to chew on the plant to be poisoned. Sniffing the pollen or licking the pollen off the fur has poisoned some cats -- it doesn't take much. Any of the lily family and daylilies are very poisonous to cats.

It is not really toxic to dogs and puppies, but may cause stomach upset (vomiting). You should also watch young children around Easter Lilies, as they could get sick if plant is ingested.

Don't throw away your Easter Lily after it is done blooming. You can save the bulb and plant it outdoors as soon as the ground can be worked. Select a sunny site with well drained soil. It may take a couple of years for the plant to bloom and they probably will bloom more in June or July. They are hardy even in cold climates, but provide some winter protection for them.

Enjoy your Easter Lily in all its beauty and glory. It is a flower that symbolizes joy, hope and life.

There is no Master Gardener public education class this Saturday. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.