



## Notes from the Greenhouse

By Tonya Roberts, Greenhouse Specialist  
March 28, 2014



### Easter Lily

Common Name: Easter Lily

Botanical Name: *Lilium Longiflorum*

Family: Liliaceae

### History and Interesting Facts:

1. The Easter lily is native to the southern islands of Japan.
2. During the early 1800's, commercial bulb production started in the Bermuda Islands, and the first commercial supplies of bulbs were shipped to the United States. Around the turn of the century the Japanese took over the annual Easter lily growing and exportation to the United States, which continued until World War II.
3. The current U.S. production began after a World War I soldier, Louis Houghton, brought a suitcase full of hybrid lily bulbs to the south coast of Oregon in 1919. Houghton distributed the bulbs freely to horticulture friends and neighbors. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the source of bulbs from Japan was abruptly cut off. The value of lily bulbs skyrocketed.
4. Since World War II, commercial bulb production has been centered in the United States, along the Pacific west coast in southern Oregon and northern California.
5. History, mythology, literature, poetry and the world of art are abundant with stories and images, which speak of beauty, majesty and elegance of the lily's white flowers. The lily is mentioned numerous times in the Bible.
6. Lilies, often called the "White Robed Apostles of Hope", were found growing in the Garden of Gethsemane after Christ's crucifixion. Tradition has it that beautiful white lilies sprung up where drops of Christ's sweat fell to the ground in his final hours on the cross. Churches continue this tradition, surrounding their alters and crosses with Easter lilies to celebrate the resurrection of Christ and hope of everlasting life.

### Production of Easter Lilies:

Easter lilies are classified as "long-day plants". These plants bloom when they receive more than 12 hours of light. Easter lilies naturally flower in August.

To overcome the long day requirements of Easter lilies to flower can be done by a cooling period. Bulbs of Easter lilies are given a cool, moist treatment for 6 weeks at 42°F.

When this period ends, bulbs are potted up, watered and put in a greenhouse. Shoots emerge in about 2 weeks, which should occur in early January.

Easter lilies can be difficult to manipulate to grow so that they reach their peak blooming timed with Easter. To slow the flowering process, lilies are moved to a dark, cool place at about 40°F for a week or less at the "puffy white" bud stage. This helps the lilies so that they will flower on time for Easter.



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A bud meter was designed so buds can be measured. If the buds measure 1 inch you have 28 days until the bud opens. If the bud measures 6 inches, you have one day before the bud opens. Depending on the size of the bud and when Easter is will determine whether you need to put the lily in a warmer place to speed up the flowering process. If the bud is too far ahead, the lily should be placed in a cooler place so the buds do not bloom out before Easter.

### Care of Easter Lilies:

Easter lilies prefer moderately cool temperatures. A daytime temperature of 60-65°F and slightly cooler night temperatures is ideal. Avoid drafty locations. Easter lilies do best when placed in bright light, but out of direct sun light.

In the plant has a decorative foil pot punch holes in the bottom of the pot and place a saucer beneath. Water the Easter lily only when the soil is dry to the touch. Water thoroughly, so water flows freely out the bottom of the pot. Discard any water that drains into the saucer.

As the flowers open, remove the yellow anthers. Removing anthers prolongs the life of the flower and prevents pollen from staining the white petals. Flowers should be removed as they wither. After flowering, the Easter lily can be saved and planted outdoors.

### Planting Outdoors:

Place the plant in a sunny window after flowering. Continue watering when needed. Fertilize once or twice a month with fertilizer for houseplants. Transplant the flower outdoors when the danger of frost has passed. The site you choose for planting should be well drained. When planting, place the bulb 6 inches deep. The original plant will die back within a few weeks. Cut back old growth to the surface of the soil. New growth should emerge by summer.