



Easter Lily Production and Care

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Many consumers look forward to purchasing lily plants for the Easter holiday; however, few are aware of the lengthy process involved with producing this traditional holiday plant.

Growing commercially produced Easter lilies

Easter lily production actually begins more than six months before the holiday when the bulbs are dug and shipped to individual growers. The bulbs are cultivated mainly in the Pacific Northwest, and they grow in the field two to four years before large enough for commercial use. When lily bulbs reach the proper size (7 to 10 inches in circumference), they are dug up. This usually occurs in September and October.

Commercial greenhouse crop growers can buy either “case-cooled” bulbs or they can chill them on their own. Flower buds form inside lily bulbs only after they are chilled at 40 degrees Fahrenheit for six weeks, or about 1,000 hours. Case-cooled bulbs are packed first by the bulb producer and then appropriately chilled. Non-pre-cooled bulbs are packed and shipped to the commercial greenhouse crop grower who then pots and chills them on racks in large refrigerated rooms.

After cooling, lilies are forced into bloom. Plants are watered, fertilized, and watched very closely for up to 20 weeks on greenhouse benches. Environmental conditions are constantly adjusted, and greenhouse

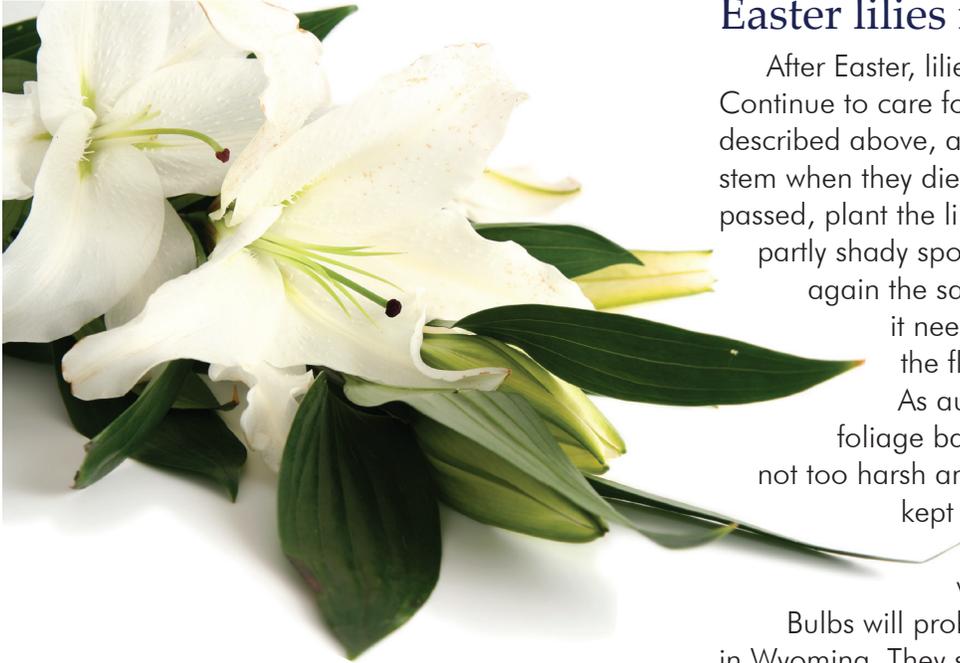
temperatures are carefully controlled to speed up or slow down plant development.

Easter lilies must be in peak condition and ready for sale in time for Palm Sunday. Growing Easter lilies is always a challenge for greenhouse crop producers because the Easter Sunday date changes each year. It can be as early as March 23 or as late as April 25, a difference of almost five weeks. For years with early Easters, many growers may still have poinsettias on greenhouse benches when lilies come out of the cooler. Late Easters may have to share space with flowering annual plants on the benches. Scheduling bench space can truly be difficult.

Easter lilies in the home

Understanding how Easter lilies are produced should help consumers appreciate the hard work and time taken to grow each and every plant. Several greenhouses in the Rocky Mountain Region grow Easter lilies, and most retailers are able to market regionally grown plants.

Place Easter lilies in a bright area away from drafts and heat sources and keep the soil



moderately moist. Remember to discard extra water from the saucer because lily roots decay in waterlogged soil. Removing the orange/yellow pollen sacs from the flowers keeps them from discoloring the pure white petals as well as linens and clothing. If well-cared for, Easter lilies will continue to bloom for 10 to 14 days.

Easter lilies in the garden

After Easter, lilies can be planted outside. Continue to care for the plant indoors, as described above, and remove flowers from the stem when they die. After the danger of frost has passed, plant the lilies outdoors in a sheltered, partly shady spot. The lily will not bloom again the same year it is planted because it needs 1,000 hours of cold so the flower buds can form again. As autumn approaches, cut the foliage back. If the winter weather is not too harsh and the soil around the bulb is kept moist, it should sprout again the next spring, complete with flower buds.

Bulbs will probably not survive the winter in Wyoming. They should be dug up in the fall and placed with moist peat moss in a container that holds moisture in. Keep the bulbs in a refrigerator (40 degrees Fahrenheit) until spring. Gardeners can try to force the bulbs indoors or replant them outside after frost has passed.

Also see *Care of Flowering Potted Plants*, UW CES bulletin B-1146, at <http://ces.uwyo.edu/PUBS/B1146.pdf>.

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