

## Asiatic and Oriental Lilies

by Sylvia Sloan, Fairfax Master Gardener

Lilies are considered by some to be an old-fashioned flower found blooming in many neighborhood gardens. Almost everyone is familiar with the pure white Oriental lily that is popular in bridal bouquets, and the orange tiger lily with its black spots. Lilies come in a variety of colors, textures and heights and can be an attractive addition to your landscape, with blooms throughout the spring and summer, depending on the variety planted.

Lilies are in the family Liliaceae, and true lilies are in the genus *Lilium*. All plants in this genus are from temperate regions of North America, Europe and Asia. Though their flowers and foliage are similar, they vary in their growth habits, flower forms and bloom times. Two types of lilies in the Liliaceae family are the Asiatic lilies and Oriental lilies. Although similar, there are some unique differences.



Asiatic Lilies

photo: Eric Draper, Ohio State University



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Asiatic Lily 'Forever Susan'

**Asiatic lilies** are hybrids bred from several other lilies. They are known for their vibrant colors (shades of gold, yellow, orange, rose, pink, lavender and white) and may be variegated. The Asiatic lily flowers from mid-June through mid-July. Asiatic lily flowers have no fragrance or aroma and range from 4 to 6 inches (10 to 15 cm) across, and the petals have smooth edges. Asiatic varieties usually grow shorter, 2 to 4 feet tall (60 to 120 cm) than Oriental varieties, and their flowers will typically face upward, while the Oriental will face straight out or slightly downward.

**Oriental lilies** are hybrids that come from crossing a variety of Oriental lilies. They differ from Asiatic

lilies in that their flowers are larger, 6 to 9 inches (15 to 22 cm) across, and they have a very fragrant aroma. Their colors are mostly red, purple, pink or white. Their petals have ruffled edges and their leaves are more lance-shaped. They bloom in late summer, August through September. The stem grows from a loose scaly bulb that will make offsets over time. Plants can be from 1 to 6 feet (0.3 to 1.8 m) tall depending on the cultivar, and they usually need to be staked.

Asiatic and Oriental Lilies are perennials grown from bulbs; you can plant the bulbs in spring or fall. Full sun to light shade is best, and they prefer well-drained loamy soil. Bulbs can rot in poorly drained soils. Propagation is best done by division of clumps or bulblets. The lilies grow well in Zones 4a to 8b, but the lily beetle and aphids may be pests.

Plants in the *Lilium* genus are highly toxic to cats. Even licking the pollen or drinking water from a vase can cause serious harm. Every part of the plant is dangerous: petals, leaves, stems and even the water they sit in. Symptoms, including vomiting, loss of appetite and lethargy can show up within 12 hours. If untreated, it can lead to irreversible kidney failure in just 18 hours. The safest thing you can do is to not leave lilies anywhere your cat can reach. If you think they came into contact with a lily, call your vet right away. Fast treatment is critical.

In addition, lilies are also toxic to rabbits, and deer may browse the plants. Lily pollen can stain clothes and hands.



photo: Barbara H. Smith, ©2021 HGIC, Clemson University

*Oriental Lily 'Anastasia'*

#### References

- [Asiatic vs. Oriental Lilies...Same Plants or Different?](#), Buckeye Yard & Garden Online
- [Lilium - Asiatic Hybrids](#), North Carolina Extension Plant Toolbox
- [Lilies and Cats: A Deadly Combination](#), Virginia Tech News