

# Easter Lilies

*Lilium longiflorum*, the Latin name for the Easter Lily, is native to the Ryukyu Islands of southern Japan. The Easter Lily industry is an American success story. Prior to 1941, the majority of the Easter Lily bulbs were exported to the United States from Japan. World War II eliminated the dependence on Japanese produced bulbs and commercial bulb production shifted to the U.S. The Japanese have never been able to regain any of their lost market shares due to the superior quality of the U.S.-grown bulbs.

Today over 95% of all bulbs grown for the potted Easter Lily market are produced by just ten farms in a narrow coastal region straddling the California-Oregon border. The Easter Lily bulbs are harvested in the fall, packed and shipped to commercial greenhouses where they are planted in pots and forced under controlled conditions to bloom for the Easter holiday.

The cultivar most widely grown today for greenhouse potted Easter Lily production is called "Nellie White." This selection was made by a lily grower named James White, and was named after his wife. The cultivar "Nellie White" has large, white trumpet shaped flowers.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Easter Lilies had a wholesale value of \$39.7 million in 2009. This makes the Easter Lily the fourth largest crop in wholesale value in the United States pot plant market, behind poinsettias, mums and azaleas. Of these four top crops, the Easter Lily has the narrowest holiday sales window, typically only 2 weeks. The poinsettia has a holiday sales window of approximately 6 weeks, and mums and azaleas are available year-round.

The states that produce the highest number of potted Easter Lilies, according to the U.S.D.A., are: 1. California; 2. Florida; 3. Hawaii; 4. Illinois; and 5. Maryland.

The Easter Lily -- the Latin name is *Lilium longiflorum* - is native to the southern islands of Japan. In the 1880's, it was widely cultivated in Bermuda and bulbs were shipped to this country. Around the turn of the century, the Japanese took over the annual growing exportation of Easter Lilies to the United States, and continued to dominate the U. S. export market until the start of World War II.

Precise growing conditions are necessary since the Easter Lily bulbs must be cultivated in the fields for three, and sometimes four years, before they are ready to be shipped to commercial greenhouse growers. Those years, however, are not a carefree time for the bulbs nor for the growers. The bulbs are never dormant and require constant care and attention to assure superior quality and cleanliness. Each bulb is handled up to 40 times before it is ready to be shipped.

A commercial- sized bulb often starts as a small, baby bulblet growing underground on the stem of its mother plant. When the mother plant is harvested, the bulblet is carefully removed and planted in another field. One year later, the bulblet, now called a yearling, is dug up again. The yearling is planted in a new field for another full year of cultivation and specialized care to allow it to grow into its full potential, maturity and status as a commercial bulb.

Bulb harvesting takes place each year in the fall, during late September and early October. At harvest time, the lily fields become a bustle of hectic activity as the growers orchestrate a 3-ring circus. Commercialized bulbs are dug, cleaned, graded, sorted, packed and cooled. Yearling bulbs are dug, treated and replanted in newly-prepared fields for the following year's commercial crop. And, baby bulblets are stripped from the mother plants and tenderly placed in the ground to start them on the road to becoming commercials in 2 or 3 years.

The commercial bulbs are shipped to greenhouse growers throughout the United States and Canada who force the plants under controlled conditions to flower in time for Easter. This is a very tricky process since Easter falls on a different day each year, dependent upon celestial bodies. The first Sunday that follows the first full moon after the vernal equinox, Easter can be any day between March 22 and April 25. Crop scheduling and timing is critical - another reason why the bulbs have to be of such a consistent

high quality with reliable vigor and performance. The flowers must bloom exactly when they're supposed to, with no margin for error.

From the fields to the greenhouse to your home, the Easter Lily remains the traditional, time-honored flower of Easter. Symbolic of a resurrection, Easter Lilies rise from earthy graves as scaly bulbs, and bloom into majestic flowers that embody the beauty, grace and tranquility of the special region from which they originate.

Caution for Cat Owners - Easter Lily is the common name for *Lilium longiflorum*. This fragrant seasonal plant is extremely poisonous for cats. Eating small amounts of any part of this plant can cause dangerous symptoms and lead to death from kidney failure. Early symptoms include vomiting, which may begin only two hours after a cat eats part of an Easter lily. Laboratory evidence of kidney damage begins after a day or so. There is no specific antidote. To be effective, treatment by a veterinarian must begin no later than eighteen hours after exposure. Immediate treatment, which can limit the amount of plant material absorbed, is much better. Cats seem to be the only species that suffers kidney failure after eating Easter lily. This plant is not poisonous to children, though it should be kept out of reach because children can choke on plant pieces.

### ***The Woods in Your Backyard Workshop***

If you would like to learn how to create and enhance natural areas around your home here is your opportunity. This is a two-part workshop being held May 5th and 12th from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm at the Faith Christian Academy. Cost is \$15/individual or \$20/family and includes a manual & light refreshments. For more information, please contact Craig Highfield, Program Manager, Forestry for the Bay at 410-267-5723 or email [chighfield@chesapeake.net](mailto:chighfield@chesapeake.net). A brochure with a registration form is available at:

<http://www.opequoncreek.org/Gallery%20Events/Workshops/WoodsInYourBackyard2011.pdf>

### ***Regional Roundtable on West Virginia Food & Farms***

There will be a Regional Roundtable on West Virginia Food & Farms for the Potomac Headwaters area on May 2 from 6:30 – 8:30 pm at the Panorama at the Peak located at 3299 Cacapon Rd., Berkeley Springs, WV. This meeting will discuss what is needed to strengthen our state's local food economy and to get more healthy, locally-farmed food to the plates and forks of West Virginians. RSVP is requested. Please visit: <http://www.wvhub.org/wvffc/west-virginia-food-charter> or call the Morgan County Extension Office 304-258-8400. This project is a partnership of: West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition, West Virginia University Extension Service and Small farm Center, West Virginia Department of Education, Rural Support Partners, West Virginia Community Development Hub, Panorama at the Peak and numerous statewide and local partners.

### ***2011 Western Maryland Pasture-Based Meat Goat Performance Test***

The nomination period for the 2011 Western Maryland Pasture-Based Meat Goat Performance Test opened on Friday, April 1 and closes on May 15. All nominations received by May 15 will be treated the same. It is not necessary to identify individual goats on the nomination form. Just indicate the number of goats that you plan to consign. There is a \$20 per goat nomination fee. A balance of \$65 per goat will be due upon delivery to the test site. Goats must be delivered to the test site on Friday or Saturday, June 3 or 4. Special arrangements can be made for those who need to deliver their goats before June 3. No goats can be brought to the test site after June 4. If nominations exceed test capacity, preference will be given to Maryland residents and previous consigners. Up to 80 goats will be accepted for the 2011 test. All nominations received during the nomination period will be treated the same. If more than 80 goats are nominated, preference will be given to previous consigners and Maryland residents.

<http://www.sheepandgoat.com/programs/GoatTest/2011/2011guidelinesprotocol.pdf>

<http://www.sheepandgoat.com/programs/GoatTest/2011/2011Nominationform.pdf>

Please contact Susan at [sschoen@umd.edu](mailto:sschoen@umd.edu) or (301) 432-2767 x343 if you have any questions about this year's test.

### ***Looking for Native Plants?***

Winston Gardens is holding an open house on April 30 & May 1 from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. There will be 30+ varieties of native trees & shrubs, potted up and available for immediate plating in your garden. Benefits from the proceeds will go to help sponsor a child at the Potomac Valley Audubon Society Summer Camp. Call 304-267-6924, or go to [www.winstongardens](http://www.winstongardens) for more information.

### **Garden Tips**

- Seed new lawn
- Seed carrots
- Plant sweet corn
- Apply pre-emergent landscape weed control
- Plant summer flowering bulbs
- Begin spraying fruit trees after petals fall

***Until next time ... Until next time ...Happy Spring, Gardening, and Farming!***

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