

Growing Lilies From Seed

There are as many different methods of growing lilies from seed as there are types of lilies available. Here are some of the ways and methods:

Usually ripe clean seed is used. By clean seed we mean seed that has been cleaned and has had the "chaff" removed. It is possible to tell if the seed is viable. Hold the seed up to the light or place on a piece of glass with a bright light source under it. You should be able to see the growing point of the seed.

Now, where to grow the seed.

Lily seed will grow irrespective of where it is sown, but for beginners, we recommend to grow the seed in a pot. A margarine pot will do fine. Make two or three holes in the bottom, extending to about 1cm up the side of the pot for drainage, then using sharp sand, mix 50/50 with compost or seed raising mix. Fill the pot to about three quarters full with this mix, then place the seed on top of this. Using a fine sieve, sieve some compost over the seed to about 5mm. Place the container in water for 1 or two hours or until the water is taken up by the mix. Take the container out and let it drain. The seed should sprout in two to three weeks if it is kept damp but not wet. Leave the seedlings for a year in the container, again ensuring they do not dry out or are too wet, and after one year, transplant into the garden or individual pots.

Growing Seeds in the Open Garden.

Prepare a fine bed of soil, once again drainage is very important, so I recommend that some sharp sand be placed into the bottom of the drill, then place the seed on top of this bed, cover with 5mm of fine soil or compost. These seedlings should also be left where they are for at least 12 months.

Some Variations of Growing Medium.

As already mentioned, sharp sand is the cheapest and easiest to obtain.

Vermiculite (Granulated mica) - This is light in weight, easy to handle, and holds large quantities of water without becoming waterlogged. It is free from weed seeds and the fungi that causes "Dampening off". Nutriments have to be added.

Perlite - A grayish material of organic origin, mined from lava flows. It is very light in weight and is also sterile, but tends to float off when watered. It is easy to over water and very hard to dry out because of its fineness. Nutriments have to be added.

Sphagnum moss - A natural material found in bogs, mostly on the West Coast. It is relatively sterile, light in weight and has a high water holding capacity. It is mostly used by placing seed on compost first, then covering the seed with sphagnum moss to a depth of approximately 10 mm.

Pumice - Pumice is organic in origin and is sometimes difficult to obtain, but it has very good moisture retaining properties, is sterile and would need nutriments added.

Sawdust - is easy to obtain, is cheap and has some good advantages. The most important thing to remember about this medium, is that it should not be from any treated timber. Also sawdust tends to retain moisture and should be kept relatively dry. It would be better used with some other medium such as compost, peat or seed mixture.

It would be a good idea to try some of these mediums on their own or as a mixture, but do be careful when watering as some of these are so light, that they tend to float when watered from above.

When to plant our seed; As a general rule you will receive your seed about February or March. Most people would advocate sowing the seed as soon as possible after receiving it for two reasons:

- (a) The older the seed the less viable it becomes.
- (b) Fall is nature's growing period and April/ May is when new growth will be at its best.

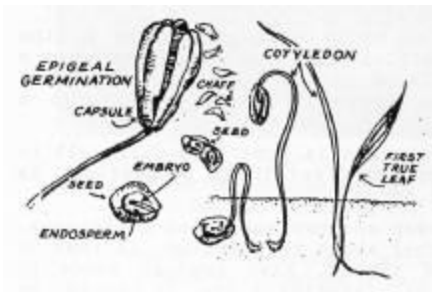
Green seed that is, seed straight from the pod. This works quite well with some types of lilies and is worthwhile experimenting with.

One Member sometimes uses tweezers to place his seed no more than 1" deep in the medium (about 5 seeds to a 6 inch pot), with the tip pointing down. It would be interesting to know whether seed planted this way germinates any sooner.

With the right conditions, lily seed isn't really hard to grow. One of our members when weeding one Fall, discovered a thick, bunch of what she thought was new grass growing between the garden and the concrete path. It turned out to be a trumpet lily pod which had lain there all winter and from which every seed seemed to have germinated. Many self sown lilies have probably disappeared in Fall weeding sessions, or have made a great meal for slugs and snails.

A trap that the beginner could fall into is that there are two types of seeds of lilies;

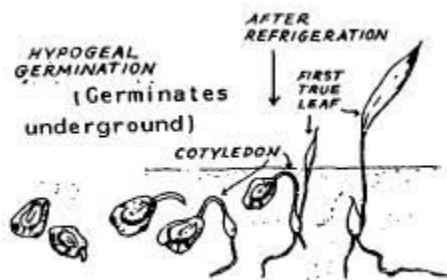
The first being quick type, "Epigeal" (Epi meaning on or above, and Ge, earth). This type of seed will germinate, send up a leaf, and form a bulb under the surface. Some examples are Asiatic hybrids and Trumpet hybrids and their species, *L. pumilum*, *L. davidii*, *L. henryi* and *L. longiflorum*.



How to start the Epigeal or quick-germinating types indoors

1. Purchase some soilless seedling mix
2. Moisten mix until it feel damp
3. Place in growing container
4. Plant seed and sprinkle mix on top
5. Cover with plastic cover and keep around 20 C
6. Check in about 14 days for germination

The second, slow type, is known as "Hypogeal" (Hypo under, Ge, earth), and has a two stage germination process, a warm period and a cold period. This type still forms a bulb under the surface but may not send up a leaf for several months or a year, so do not throw your pots away for at least a year. Examples are martagons and martagon hybrids and Western American species and their hybrids.



Keep a diary of your seed sowing, e.g. sowing, first leaf etc. and if your seed is from the seed pool, record the number as well as the name. Don't forget to label your seed sowings.

We would like you to write and tell us about any of your lily growing experiences or problems, and what seed sowing medium you found most successful. Good luck!