



Caring for Springtime Holiday Plants

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

Pure white, heavenly scented Easter lilies have always been a favorite gift this time of year both to give and to receive. The large, trumpet-shaped blossoms last for several days, especially if the bright yellow anthers are removed. This also means no pollen stains on furniture or tablecloths. Hopefully, your plant came with several unopened buds so that you can continue to enjoy this beautiful plant for a few more weeks.

Potted lilies, whether the Easter lily or Stargazer, will do best in bright light. Don't put them in full sun all day from the start but rather gradually acclimate them to more time in the sun over the course of a week or so. Daytime temperatures of about 65 – 70 degrees F are perfect with slightly cooler nights.

Often lilies, as well as other holiday plants, come with decorative pot covers. Ideally these covers should be removed, especially if they are covering some of the foliage. Most of these decorative covers are watertight but holes or tears can occur. It is usually a good idea to put a plate or saucer under the pot if set on furniture.

When watering your plant, bring it to the sink and remove the decorative pot cover. Thoroughly moisten the potting mix until water is running out of the bottom of the pot. Then let the plant drain for a few minutes before placing it back in its decorative pot cover. Try not to let the potting mix dry out too much or become oversaturated.

Your lily can be planted outdoors in mid to late May. Set the bulb about 6 inches deep. The foliage will die back and it should then be cut off. You might be pleasantly surprised by new growth and a second blooming in September. Since these bulbs are marginally hardy, they stand a better chance of surviving the winter with a mulch of shredded bark, straw or evergreen boughs.

Lilies aren't the only forced bulb popular this time of year. Pots of hyacinths, daffodils and tulips also are plentiful. They also will last longest if set in a cool, bright spot, away from heat sources. Daffodils and hyacinths can be planted in garden or shrub beds after they have finished blooming. Both are long-lived bulbs and will bloom reliably for years to come. Tulips, while splendid in bloom, usually are not counted on for repeat performances. You can try planting them in the garden but personally I would just compost them when the show ends.

After the daffodils or hyacinths finish blooming, remove the spent flower stalks but not the foliage. All of the flowering bulbs can be fertilized with a half strength liquid feed every other week until planting outdoors. Allow the foliage to die back naturally and trim it off when it browns.

Roses seem to be a very popular spring holiday plant this year. I received a sunny gold one and a pale pink scented one for Easter. Both were labeled as miniature roses although the blooms were different in size. Looking at the label that came with both of them, scant directions were given on how to care for them anticipating that they would be potted houseplants. I've yet to find a way to keep miniature roses alive and blooming indoors without supplemental lighting. Plus being limited on space, both my roses will go out into the ground come May.

For your potted roses, place them in the brightest, sunniest window you have, preferably a south or west facing one. Once or twice a week, give your plants a quarter turn so they won't bend toward the light.

Roses are finicky about water. When the soil feels dry to the touch, give them a good drink. Just like potted lilies and other bulbs, potted roses often have a decorative pot cover so remove it before watering them and let the pot drain before setting it back in the pot cover or better yet, set the pot on a saucer. Also, like potted bulbs, fertilize rose plants with a half strength water soluble fertilizer every other week. Remove spent blooms and any yellowing or dead foliage.

Come the warmer weather and you have two options for moving plants outdoors. If determined to keep your rose as a houseplant, it can be repotted into a larger pot to spend the summer outdoors. A second option would be to plant it in the ground. Either way, roses would need to be hardened off before leaving them outdoors in the sun all day. Start in full shade and gradually let the plants be exposed to more and more sun each day until they tolerate a whole day's worth of sunshine. This may take 2 to 3 weeks.

Miniature roses are very cold tolerant. Set your plants in a sunny, well-drained location with a pH around 6.3. Plants can be fertilized once a month until mid-July. They should reward you with many more seasons of bloom, each a reminder of the special person who gifted them to you.

For questions about caring for holiday plants or on other gardening topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.ladybug.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.



