



## A Brief History of Easter Lilies and the Role of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center

**1903** Because of disease problems with imported bulbs, USDA began growing large numbers of Easter lilies (*L. longiflorum*) from seed and distributing disease-free stock to the industry. Differences in height among Easter lilies seedlings were noted and a breeding program was begun to develop dwarf types. In **1929**, one of the first dwarf cultivars for potted-plant production was released. Prior to this release, lilies were tall plants and grown as a cut-flower crop.

**1932** USDA released the Bellingham Series of hybrid lilies. In **1953**, the second series of hybrids was released as the Potomac Series. These series were responsible for popularizing lilies as hardy garden plants. One of the Bellingham Series (*'Shuksan'*) is still being sold today.

**1940** Systems for commercial propagation, production and disease control of Easter lily were developed.

As a result of this research, the time of blooming could be controlled to make plants available in flower any day of the year. This ability to precisely control flowering was responsible for establishing the economically important Easter lily industry which, in **2005**, had a wholesale value of **\$35 million**.

**1995** A new technique was patented that significantly shortened Easter lily production. By manipulating temperature and light, flowering plants could be produced from seeds in less than 1 year. It typically requires 2 years of growth, including a winter dormancy, to produce a flowering plant from seed.

**2008** Genetic engineering is being used today to create virus-resistant Easter lilies for the marketplace.

**Lily Facts:** The most popular garden lilies are the Asiatic, Trumpet and Oriental hybrids. Asiatic lilies have a short stem with solid red through yellow flowers. New types of Asiatic lilies with novel color patterns have recently been developed. Oriental lilies, known for their fragrance, typically produce a large stem of white as exemplified by the Easter lily. Exciting new hybrids are currently in development. In the home, lilies require a sunny spot and should be grown in well-drained soil away from drafts and drying heat sources.

### *Did you know?*

*The Easter lily is native to the southern islands of Japan.*

*The Easter lily is the fourth largest crop in the U.S. potted plant market, behind poinsettias, mums and azaleas.*

*Michigan and California Produce the highest number of*

For more information, contact the Floral & Nursery Plants Research Unit at [John.Hammond@ars.usda.gov](mailto:John.Hammond@ars.usda.gov)



## Easter Lily Care

### DO

Place your plant in indirect sunlight at 60<sup>o</sup>-65<sup>o</sup> F.

Water when the soil feels dry to the touch.

After blooming, plant the bulb 6 inches deep in a sunny spot in the garden. It should bloom next June. Heavily mulch the plants in the fall.

### DO NOT

Place your plant near cold drafts or excessive heat.

Overwater your plant or allow it to sit in standing water.

Expose your plant to chilling winds when transporting.