

# Propagating Lilies

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FEW BULBOUS PLANTS can compare with the statuesque lily, which blends grace and architectural structure with color and fragrance in almost any combination that one can conjure up. There is already a great range of variation among the wild species, but an even greater diversity now exists thanks to the skills of plant breeders. Yet raising lilies from seed is a slow business, and you cannot guarantee that the offspring will be exactly like their parents. If you want to increase a very special lily hybrid, or to maintain a wild species in its true character, then scaling is the technique for you.

Scaling is the removal of a few scales from the outside of the parent bulb and providing them with the stimulus to form new bulblets. Unlike some modern methods of increasing plants rapidly, which require fairly sophisticated procedures and hygienic conditions for success, scaling is a practice that can be carried out by the average garden enthusiast with the will to succeed and a warm, dry place. The simple accoutrements are trays or clean plastic bags with ties, a sterile medium like vermiculite or sphagnum peat moss, and some labels.

Practice scaling with colorful Asiatic hybrids. Asiatics produce bulblets very readily and reach flowering size more quickly than most lilies.



## I. Choose Healthy Parents

We are often advised that the best way to ensure longevity is to choose your parents carefully. This is a good message to bear in mind when selecting which lily bulbs you are going to propagate. Unfortunately, there are many incurable viruses that infect lilies. These menaces are carried through to the offspring if vegetative methods of propagation such as scaling are

employed, and the only remedy is to destroy them and raise a new batch from seed.

Check the plants during their growing season for any signs of disease, such as yellow mottling or streaking of the leaves and distortion of the shoots and flowers. Reject any of those that are in any way suspect and propagate only from really healthy specimens.

**A QUESTION OF TIMING** Although experience has shown that late summer or early fall is a good time to remove scales, this operation can be carried out at any time of the year. In milder climates (USDA Zone 6 and above), removing scales in August or September will result in bulblets by November, which can be put in a nursery bed until they can be planted out in their permanent positions in the spring. Alternatively, gardeners in hard winter regions (Zone 5 and below) can time scaling to late fall or early winter, so that bulblets are ready for planting outside as soon as spring arrives.—B.M.



## 2. Remove the Scales

With your fingers, carefully remove the soil on one side of the lily, working down the stem toward the bulb. Work gently; many but not all lilies have stem roots that arise just above the bulb. Once you've reached the bottom of the bulb,

snap off a few scales (removing up to 10 or so scales from around the circumference of a flowering-size bulb will have no adverse effect), and fill in the hole again. Done with care, the lily will scarcely know what has happened.

## 3. Wash the Scales

Wash the scales in clean water to remove any soil adhering to them. Dip them briefly in fungicide (for

example, one based on thiabendazole) to help prevent rot; shake off any excess.



## 4. Storage

Put the scales in polyethylene bags of vermiculite or peat mix, just dampened, and seal the top with a twist tie. Place the bags in a warm place. Don't forget to

label each batch. In a matter of weeks, small bulbs will begin to form on the broken surfaces of the scales and begin to root.

## 5. Caring for the Offspring

Once the young bulbs have formed, they need to be transplanted into soil for growing on, either in open nursery beds of good soil or in containers. (In cold areas, the latter may be essential.) Carefully remove the bulb-lets, with their new roots

attached, from the scales. Many lilies require a cool period before they commence any green growth, so don't expect to see leaves straight away—they will most likely wait until spring before breaking dormancy. ■

