

Storing Tropical Water Lilies

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Tropical Water Lilies are a joy in the water garden. Their dramatic, sweetly fragrant blossoms are usually larger than those of hardy water lilies, and appear all Summer and into Fall. Its a shame many gardeners north of Zone 8 treat these lilies as annuals. With a little care, however, it is possible to overwinter the tubers indoors, and enjoy the flowers again next year.

In early Fall stop fertilizing your lilies and watch for signs of dormancy. The plants will stop flowering and producing new leaves: older leaves will turn yellow and die. Keep the plants in the pond until there has been a frost or two. The dying foliage will continue to feed the tubers, while in increasingly cool water will encourage the plants to go dormant. Once the water temperature drops to 50 degrees F., bring the plants, pots and all, inside to a cool work area.

HARVEST THE TUBERS Gently tap each plant out of its pot and rinse off as much dirt as possible. Let it air dry a few days. Then snap or slice off the remaining leaves and flower stems.

Examine the area just below the crown for the smooth, black, grape-size tuber. (Pot bound specimens may have produced additional tubers.) Gently separate the tubers from the crown and float them in tepid water for a day or so. Viable tubers will sink and spoiled ones will float. Discard the spoiled ones. To ensure complete dormancy, some experts advise leaving the viable tubers in water for up to two weeks, rinsing them daily. Others suggest air-drying them for a few days in a cool room. Either technique works well.