

How To Plant Water Lilies

One of the first plants most water gardeners want for their pond is a water lily. Some members of this large plant family (Nymphaea) are hardy enough to stay outside in our climate all year long, while others – the tropical water lilies – must be stored inside over the winter.

Most water lilies prefer a site that will give them at least 5 – 6 hours of sunlight a day, although a few varieties can get by on less. Water lilies also like still water – not near waterfalls or other areas where they'll be hit with splashing water.

With just a little care, these staples of the water garden will give you years of beautiful color and interesting lily-pad foliage that floats on the surface of the pond.

Pot up your water lilies in a cool, shaded area. That'll help prevent the roots from drying out.

We recommend planting lilies in aquatic pots or aquatic baskets – containers made specifically for water-garden plants – or you could use a sturdy plastic pot. If there are large drainage holes in your pots, place a few sheets of newspaper in the bottom before adding soil.

Unlike “regular” plants that go in the ground, water lilies should NOT be planted in garden potting mixes that are primarily peat moss. Instead, use a commercial aquatic potting mix or a soilless potting medium such as Profile.

You can also use soil from the garden, so long as it is heavy and high in clay content. Avoid light soil.

Start by filling your container about one-third full with your potting medium. Then push in one Lilytab (or similar aquatic table or granular fertilizer) for every 5 quarts of soil. The fertilizer is being added to this lower layer of the soil so it doesn't come into direct contact with the roots and burn them.

Next, add more potting medium until the container is about half full. Then position the lily.

Finally, cover the soil with about a half-inch of pea gravel. The crown should be just poking out above the gravel. Pea gravel is needed to keep the soil in place and to discourage fish from disturbing the soil and plant.

Your lily is now ready to go in the pond.

Place new plants at a depth of 8-12” for about the first three months of growth. Keep in mind that lilies normally take 2-3 weeks to adjust before new growth starts.

After about three months in the pond, sink your lilies deeper. Somewhere between 18” and 24” is ideal for hardy water lilies. Depths of between 10” and 18” is fine for tropicals.