

How To Plant a Water Lily

From Garden, Deck & Landscape

One of the easiest ways to water garden is to grow water lilies. Fill your containers for water gardens with these hardy plants for instant color.



These elegant blooms only look delicate. Plant a hardy water lily for a summer splashed with color. Though they look tropical-tender, hardy water lilies are just that — hardy. They're at home in a pond or container water garden in any Zone. Once you've planted a hardy water lily, you can leave it outside year-round in warmer Zones, lowering the pot to the deepest part of the pond in winter. If you live in a Zone where your pond freezes solid, remove the pot and overwinter your water lily in peat moss in a protected spot, such as a cellar that stays around 40°F-50°F. Repot it in the spring as you would a new plant.

Here's how to get your water lily off to a good start.

1. Hardy water lily tubers grow horizontally, so choose a shallow, wide container. One water lily will fit comfortably in a pot that is 12-18 inches wide and 6-10 inches deep. Containers with no drainage holes are best. Otherwise, line the pot with burlap or landscape fabric to keep the soil from drifting into the water.
2. Pot your water lily in topsoil, cat litter, clay or other heavy garden soil. Avoid potting soil or mixes with components that float easily, such as perlite, vermiculite, and peat. Now is the time to add aquatic plant fertilizer pellets.
3. A new plant will likely be pot-ready, but one you overwintered may need some light pruning. In either case, remove any old leaves and thick, fleshy roots. Leave only emerging leaves and buds, and newer, thin roots.
4. Plant the tuber against the side of the pot, with the growing tip pointed upward and angled about 45 degrees toward the center of the pot.
5. Cover the soil with a layer of rock to keep the soil in the pot and the fish out of the soil. You can add fertilizer tablets directly to the soil at this time or apply liquid water gardening food like Microbe-lift's Ensure per the manufactures recommendations. (Water lilies are heavy feeders and will put on an amazing show if given the nutrients they need.)
6. Now you're ready to place the plant in your pond. Water lilies need to be set so the base of the pot is 12-18 inches below the surface, allowing the leaves to float to the surface. If your pond is deeper than that, support the pot on concrete blocks, crates, or overturned pots so the plant is growing at the proper level. Hint: Soak the soil thoroughly and lower the pot into the water at an angle to let trapped air escape more easily.