

episode 57 show notes and advice

Sarah and Arthur are starting to think about their summer combinations and how to get beautiful rockets of exploding colour into the garden this summer.

On today's episode they talk about a bulb that is quite versatile and exotic for the English garden – the lily. Late May and early June can be a down time in the garden before the sweet peas and roses come up, and spectacular lilies can really fill this gap. Lilies are totally perennial bulbs - planted in right place they will naturalise and give so much pleasure. March is the time to plant lilies and Sarah and Arthur are planning to grow lots for their glamour and scale, not forgetting their incredible scent.

In this episode, discover:

- The top lily varieties Sarah and Arthur are planting this year like 'Lady Alice' and *Lilium regale*.
- Arthur's guide to planting lilies.
- The best tip for picking lilies from Sarah Cook, a previous Head Gardener at Sissinghurst.
- Lilies to grow in pots: Arthur suggests 'Tiger Babies' with grasses for a prairie garden look, or Sarah's top 3 - *Lilium regale*, 'Muscadet' and 'Casablanca'.
- How Sarah stays on top of lily beetle at Perch Hill.

Episode 57 advice sheet

How to tackle lily beetle

What puts Sarah, and many others, off growing lilies is the lily beetle – a showy, scarlet beetle that reproduces voraciously. Physical removal is the best way to tackle it. At Perch Hill they pick them into match boxes then squash them.

Another tip Sarah recommends is growing lilies in a sunny porch, conservatory or greenhouse. You will get all the loveliness of the lilies' scent and glamour with less lily beetles. Sarah will be planting lots of lilies in her greenhouse, both in pots and in the ground, all around her tomatoes. She loves the smell you get pinching out tomatoes and wants to mix this with the lilies' incredible scent.

Arthur's lily recommends

- Arthur is avoiding tree lilies which are a bit too mutant for him. He prefers species star fish lilies – like the subtly shaped 'Lady Alice' - rather than oriental biggies.
- He also likes the shorter 'Tiger Babies' to grow in a trough – these will perennialise.
- For dark lilies he likes 'Landini' and 'Nerone' – beautiful bronzey orange with crimson on the outside petal.

Sarah's lily recommends

- *Lilium regale* – one year Sarah had an excess of these bulbs in the shop at Perch Hill. She planted them all around Dutch Yard – in groups of 5 bulbs in 6 or 7 places. As they were planted quite late, they didn't do much that summer, nor the following summer. But each summer since they have been huge and have given Sarah more pleasure in late May through to June than anything else. Lilies are moth pollinated so tend to smell strongest at dawn and dusk but as the Dutch Yard is sheltered, all day long they give off the most incredible fragrance.
- Tiger babies – Sarah will also be planting these lily bulbs.
- *Lilium speciosum* var. *rubrum* – for later season flowers from July into September. A beautiful lily with petals that curl back onto stems. Not so powerfully scented but so perennial. Sarah put 7 bulbs in a large pot by a north facing wall in the Oast Garden. They have been coming up every summer for a decade! Now she has them naturalised in dappled shade to rocket up through *Osmunda regalis*, the royal fern, and *Helleborus 'Merlin'*.

Arthur's advice for planting lilies

- Lilies are great for permanent pots as they love good drainage. They like feeding so do mulch them.
- Plant bulbs several inches deep. Plant them pointy end up and don't worry if the bulbs have a sprout. Plant them with the sprout just above the soil and, even if it is bent, it will right itself in three to four weeks.
- They take dappled shade well. All lilies flower better and live longer if the soil is not cold and clammy. They prefer to have their feet in the shade and head in the sun.
- Like dahlias, nice lily varieties sell out so get orders in fast.

- Plant them as soon as they arrive as the bulbs can get mushy.
- Arthur saves rose containers and plant 4-5 lily bulbs in 1 container with grit and leaf mould – just under halfway filled then adding the bulbs so they are not touching. As they flower Arthur dots them around a border, left in the pot (the roots will go through the bottom of the pot) – a good tip if you have heavy soil. Or plant directly into nice pots and containers. Arthur will intersperse lilies with dahlias.
- If planted directly into borders, after they have established, if clumps of lilies become overcrowded, they can be dug up and divided in the autumn when the leaves have died back.
- They do need staking as they are heavy headed. Willow cane or hazel stakes are ideal.

For more information read Sarah's full growing guide how to plant and grow lilies.

Lilies as cut flowers

When picking lilies follow the advice Sarah Cook, a previous head gardener at Sissinghurst, gave to Sarah. Lilies and fritillaries have leaves that go up their stems, needed for photosynthesis. Don't pick these down to the ground (like you can for bulbs like hyacinths and narcissi that have leaves at the base of stems only). Only cut 1/3 to 1/2 of the stem leaving at least a 1/3 of the stem left with about 12 leaves on it.

At Chatsworth House, rather than cutting lilies, they grow them in pots to bring in then put outside again - so elegant and total perfume factory.

Watch your clothes! The anthers will leave orange paprika stains. Sarah removes all the anthers before the pollen comes - trials show that once pollen drops onto the stigma of the lily flower, it fertilises the plant and the flower dies fast. So as well as preventing stains, removing the anthers also effectively sterilises the plant and prolongs vase life.

A good florists' lily is 'Casablanca' - pure white oriental with huge flowers and incredible perfume – with a vase life of 2 weeks. These grew better in pots than in the ground for Sarah and she is planning to run pots of 'Casablanca' along the steps of the Oast Garden and in her greenhouse. For the same sort of loveliness on a smaller scale she recommends 'Muscadet' – another beauty with red markings.

Lilies for pots

Sarah recommends these 3 lilies for pots – combined or in families - *Lilium regale*, 'Muscadet' and 'Casablanca'.

Arthur is going for 'Tigers Babies' in his pots. If you are keen on a prairie garden look, they work brilliantly with all the grasses.

Go for at least a dozen of each variety so they pop up like jolly starfish rather than a single exclamation marks.

Try species tulips like *Lilium henryi* – perennialised in the Rose Garden at Perch Hill - or Turk's Cap lilies like *Lilium martagon*.