

Propagation of Lilies by Scaling

by Tim Zimmerman

I'm writing this article for the newer members that might not be familiar with propagation of lilies by scaling. You might have that one precious bulb in your garden that would be nice to multiply for yourself, or to share with other people. Scales sometimes fall off during shipping, so you may take home some scales from volunteering at bulb wrap. For best results, lily scaling is done in late summer and early fall.

A lily is made up of scales attached to a basal plate where the bulb roots are formed. To scale a bulb, the overlapping scales are broken off at the base and not in the middle. Each scale is pulled back gently and given a slight twist so it will break cleanly away at the basal plate. Take the first and possibly second row of scales (if bulb is large enough) and plant the remainder of the bulb back in the garden. Soak scales in a 10 % alcohol solution (rubbing alcohol is fine): 1 part alcohol to 9 parts of water. Let them soak for about 20 minutes. Rinse the scales off with cool running water.

Small bulbs will begin growing at the bottom of the scale once the following proper procedures are done. An added way to increase bulb production is as follows. Take a new razor (sterile) blade and score the interior of the scale from top to bottom in two or three parallel lines. Scoring is slightly cutting into the scale tissue.

Scales are placed in slightly damp vermiculite or peat moss and are put into a zip locked bag. Label your bag. Place the bag of scales in the dark on a shelf at room temperature for three months. You will see tiny bulbs form on the scales. Next you need to place scales in refrigeration for three months so that they go through a dormant cycle.

After three months the new bulbs can be planted. If the outside weather is too cold, then plant the bulbs inside and grow under florescent lighting. Plant bulbs, spacing them one inch apart in pots. Use a good potting soil mix and plant the bulbs ½ inch deep. At the end of May or the first of June plant out the bulbs. Plant the bulbs ½ inch deep and space the plants three inches apart. Place mulch around plants to keep them from cooking in the sun. Dig up the plants and replant in the fall.

