

# Starting Asiatic and Trumpet/Aurelian Seeds

By Forrest Peiper

This short article provides a method to start the “easy” type of lily seeds -- most Asiatic and trumpet/Aurelian hybrids. (There is another article in the Culture section on how to start martagon seeds.)

First, a little long-range planning. Asiatics will need two or three years to flower from seed, or sometimes one year if you’re lucky. Trumpets and Aurelians will usually take three. It’s best to start the seeds indoors and to move them out in spring or fall. I typically start my seeds in November or December and move them out in May, and I’ll describe that method here. I have had some of those bloom in the following August, nine months from seed! Wonderful!

## Planting the seed

If you have just a small amount, you can use a cut down milk carton or jug, or reuse flower pots. At least a four inch by four inch by four inch container should be used. I use 5.25 by 5.25 by 5.25 inch and plant about 20 Asiatic seeds or 16 trumpet seeds. Use a sterile medium. Seed starting mixes are good. Potting soils retain too much water and can promote rot. Fill and pack the containers with the medium to about half an inch from the top. Saturate the medium, letting the container sit in a tray of water for hours if necessary. Pour out the excess water in the tray. Place the seeds on the medium. I usually mist the seeds now to make sure they are completely wet. Label each pot. I include the seed parents, the date, and the number of seeds.



Photo #1: All pots planted, misted and labeled. Seeds yet to be covered.

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Cover the seeds with a half inch of saturated medium, or a quarter inch of saturated medium and then a quarter inch of wet vermiculite. (Vermiculite provides slightly better protection against damping off, or so I believe.) Then lightly cover the pot or pots so that the moisture stays inside. A temperature of 65 to 70 degrees F is fine, a little cooler for trumpets if you can provide that. Put the pot(s) under light, about an inch away. I use a mix of warm and cool spectrum four-foot fluorescent lights. A timer can be used to provide 16 or more hours per day of light. Continuous light can also be used and seems to provide best results. Then wait. In 12 to 25 days after planting you should see the cotyledons start to break the soil! They will be upside-down "U" shaped and then straighten one side to form what looks like a blade of grass. That's all you will see for a month or so.

## Caring for the sprouted seed

When you see the first sprout, or in about two weeks after sowing, uncover the pot(s). The pots should be in a deep saucer or tray so that they can be bottom-watered and I use this watering method almost all the time. To bottom-water, put a half inch to an inch (depending on pot size) of water in the tray and let the pot absorb it. Top-watering is fine too if done carefully so that the seeds are not disturbed. Be sure not to let the top layer of the pots dry out in the first few weeks. Seeds with tiny roots are there and they need water! For fertilizer, I remember reading "weekly weakly" somewhere and your seedlings will like that. Miracle Gro at about 25% strength will work well. In a month or two, true leaves will appear and then more will come, all from the little bulb that is forming where the seed was. The true leaves are broader than the cotyledons and look like the lily leaves along the stems in the garden. The plants can grow happily in their pots this way for months. Keep up the water, fertilizer and light.

## Transplanting them outside

I plant mine out in May, after the danger of frost is past. To prepare for that, the plants are "hardened off" on the three-season porch and for short periods outside on warm days/nights. This also gets them used to the bright sun. Then it's into the ground! I take the whole clump out of the pot and plant it in one hole, on a shady cool day, preferably. Some shade or light mulch over the leaves is sometimes useful. Making this transition without shock means fewer losses and more chances for August blooming lilies.

Good luck with your seeds. I would be happy to answer questions: Send them to me by using the Contact Us feature on our website.

NOTE: The North American Lily Society has additional information on their website at: <http://www.lilies.org/culture/growing-from-seed/> This webpage is taken from the book Let's Grow Lilies which has even more information on growing lilies from seed and many other topics.