

Some Suggestions For Harvesting And Care of Croft Lilies In Pacific N. W.

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The grower should distinguish between the lifting of lily bulbs for propagation and digging for market. As a rule it is best to return propagating stock to the soil with as little delay as possible. In contrast, forcing bulbs must be able to withstand a considerable period out of the soil. To survive such treatment the bulbs should be allowed to mature as much as possible. Young bulbs, as a rule, should be left in the ground until somewhat later in the season. They are prone to rot if lifted while immature.

When To Dig "Forcers"

Experience indicates that the Croft Easter lily bulb reaches maturity between the 8th and 10th weeks following full bloom. The grower should be reminded that the Easter lily in the Pacific Northwest is practically an evergreen. Within a short time after reaching maturity the bulb starts to put up a new stem, though the old stem may be perfectly green and functional. To lift the bulb at this late date would be definitely harmful. Our studies indicate that the optimum period for lifting Easter lily bulbs is between the 8th and 10th weeks following full bloom. It is suggested that the grower make a record of the date on which his lilies reached full bloom for he will doubtless want to refer to it on several occasions.

Digging The Bulbs

Digging the bulbs is still largely a hand operation though some growers are attempting to use mechanical diggers patterned after those developed by the daffodil and tulip growers. The lily grower must be ever mindful of the fact that the lily bulb is much more fragile than most other bulb. Moreover, it is firmly and strongly rooted in the soil at digging time, and the rooted stems with attached bulblets present an added problem. Since our studies indicate that rough handling very seriously affects the future performance of the bulbs, it seems that the advice given by certain grower "to treat each bulb as if it were the only one in your possession" is still worthy of consideration.

Removing Mother Bulbs

Removing the mother bulbs from the stems is a sizable operation in itself. Some growers twist or pull the stems out of the bulbs. This method is open to question since the bulb is too easily damaged by such rough handling. Experience indicates that is better to cut the stems off just above the bulbs. The better grades of apple thinning shears are very well suited to doing this work.

What to Do With Roots

If the bulbs can be handled in such a manner as to preserve the

roots in a plump and viable condition, then it is probably better to leave them as they come from the soil. If, as is often the case, they are destined to wither and die, then it is advisable to trim the longest back to within 4 or 5 inches of the bulb. Long roots, it must be admitted, are a nuisance when handling and packing the bulbs and, unless they can be maintained in a viable condition, add little, if anything, to the future performance of the bulb.

Storage of Stems, Bulblets

Experience indicates that it is desirable to leave the bulblets attached to the stems for a period of several weeks (3 or 4) following the removal of the mother bulbs. During this time the bulblets will mature and loosen on the stems so that they can be removed easily and with less danger of injury. Moreover, the bulblets actually will increase considerably in size, and our studies show that the subsequent growth performance of such bulblets is superior to those which have been removed immediately after digging.

The proper care of the stems and attached bulblets during the interim is somewhat of a problem. Experience indicates that the best method of doing this is to stand the stems upright in orange crates as fast as they are cut from the mother bulbs. The orange crate can be placed on end within easy reach of the worker and the stems layed in each half until it is comfortably, though not too snugly, filled. When the crate is placed upright on its bottom the stems will remain in an upright position. The crates and their contents should be stacked in an open shed where they will be shielded from rain but will be exposed to free circulation of the air. Usually, as soon as the mother bulbs have been disposed of, the stem bulblets can be removed for cleaning and sizing.

This method of handling the stem bulblets appears to have several advantages over others. Convenience is doubtless one advantage. Keeping the material relatively dry will help prevent the spread of the bud and leaf nematode which is liable to be present. The bulblets mature and loosen from the stems with a minimum amount of root and top growth. And, as stated above, our studies show that bulblets so treated make a better stand and produce a superior growth when compared to bulblets handled by other methods.

Cleaning The Bulbs

As soon as the bulbs (or bulblets) have been removed from the stems, they should be freed of excess soil. This is quite a problem for certain growers whose soil happens to be somewhat heavy and of a more sticky type. It is suggested that the grower provide himself with two suitable contain-

ers (small barrels will do), one for water and one for a disinfectant of Spergon in water. The Spergon should be prepared to contain one pound of wettable spergon in 25 gallons of water (1-200 by weight). (Spergon is a product of U. S. Rubber Co., Naugatuck Connecticut).

Wire baskets, preferably of sufficient capacity each to hold the contents of a crate, should be available. If these are made of one-fourth inch hardware cloth they will hold the smallest stem bulblets as well as the larger sizes.

Strainer pails or egg baskets manufactured for poultrymen often make ideal containers. The bulbs should be placed in a basket and plunged into the water to remove the excess soil. The basket of bulbs should then be suspended above the container while the excess water drains from the bulbs. The bulbs are next lowered into the Spergon suspension and allowed to remain immersed for 10-15 minutes. When the bulbs are removed from the Spergon suspension they should be permitted to drain well before being returned to the crate.

It is advisable to change the wash water frequently. Just how often the Spergon suspension should be renewed has not been determined. Obviously, it is inadvisable to treat too many baskets of bulbs in the same suspension.

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Care of the Stock

The need for careful handling of the bulbs has been stressed. Each grower should plan his work so that it involves a minimum amount of handling of the bulbs.

The use of large crates or containers is apparently to be avoided. The standard cranberry crates makes a useful container of about the right size. Half bushel baskets are also available in the region and make a most useful container.

Excessive drying or desiccation should be avoided at all times. Easter lily bulbs seem to keep quite well when stored in slatted crates in open sheds in the Pacific Northwest during the season when they are being prepared for market or planting. This is fortunate since few growers have

facilities for storing the bulbs in an atmosphere of controlled temperature and humidity. It is to be reminded, however, that the bulbs keep best in an atmosphere that is humid enough to prevent desiccating the bulbs and a temperature of from 45° to 55°.

Sizing the Stock

The sizing of lily bulbs is a hand operation. It may be some adaptation of the mechanical sizers employed by the growers of Narcissus, Iris or Tulip. For example, a size 7 bulb 7 inches in circumference.

Many growers have prepared sizing boards with holes in them which will admit bulbs of various sizes. For convenience
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