

Causes Of Recent Low Bud Count In Croft Lilies When "Forced"

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varieties 35 degree storage the bud count more rapidly at 50 degrees, but in early with southern-grown 50 degree storage always the bud count most se-

of Acceleration

Despite of the above state- based on the results of experimentation, the ar- concluded with the following con- ditions:

Easter next year (1946 on April 21, it is probably on the basis of present on, to store Croft or Ace at 35 degrees until plant- the bulbs are received in October and potted after as they would have from 115 days to make Easter, should be enough." This advice was followed by the trade, and there to believe it was, is it under forcers complained bud counts?

Certain distributors are known to have assembled their bulbs with as little delay as possible and to have placed them in iced refrigeration for shipment east. Doubtless these bulbs were rushed into cold storage on arrival at destination and held in such storage until sent to the florists for forcing.

If these same bulbs had been shipped in common storage (approximately 65°F.) potted as soon as received, and placed in cold frames or cool houses where they could have developed as nature intended, there would have been few, if any, complaints of low bud count. Again, the grower is being blamed for something beyond his control.

Easter of 1946

A more recent article by Stuart ("The Effect of Temperature and Length of Storage on Forcing of Northwest Lilies") in Florists Review of September 26, 1946) is of special interest at this time. These studies were also based on

uniform samples of Croft Estate and Ace Easter Lily bulbs grown in Oregon. The results can be summarized as follows:

"In all three varieties bulbs potted without any cold storage required more than 225 days in the greenhouse before blooming. Storage of the Ace and Croft bulbs at 35 degrees and 50 degrees F. for four weeks reduced the time in the greenhouse by about three months.

An ever greater reduction in days to first bloom resulted from cold storage treatment. With no storage Croft bloomed on May 28, Estate on June 16, and Ace on June 28. As the length of storage is extended, the number of days to blooming decreases. Croft bulbs stored at 35 degrees for four (six) and 12 weeks, bloomed in 138, 116 and 106 days, respectively. Those stored for the same period at 50 degrees bloomed in 147, 113 and 96 days. The results with Ace, which blooms slightly later than Croft, were similar in that storage at 35 degrees produced earlier blooms than at 50 degrees when the period was four weeks. The results were essentially the same for the Estate."

"Reducing the number of days to blooming always results in a lowered bud count. Unstored Croft bulbs produced 9.4 blooms per plant while those stored at 35 degrees produced 5.5, 3.8 and 3.2 blooms, following four, eight and 12 weeks of storage. The same reduction followed the 50 degree storage, the respective bud counts being 6.2, 3.7 and 3.3 per plant. The results with Ace were similar. With the Estate, 35 degree storage was particularly damaging to the bud count, reducing it to 1.6 after 12 weeks."

"Since a high bud count is more important in pot lilies than in those intended for cut flower production, northwest lilies should receive short periods of cold storage for Easter forcing, amount depending upon the earliness of the lily and the date of Easter. Croft lilies potted December 6, after eight weeks at 35 degrees bloomed April 1 (1946), nearly three weeks ahead of Easter with a bud count of 3.8. The same variety held at 65 degrees from October 11 until November 8, and then stored four weeks at 35 degrees, bloomed April 18, with a bud count of 6.4. Obviously Croft bulbs should not be stored at low temperatures as soon as harvested when Easter is late or the plants will bloom too soon or have a very low bud count. Apparently better results will be obtained if after harvest the bulbs are held in common storage at 65 degrees or higher in a fairly dry pack, to discourage rooting and sprouting and then given a short period, four to six weeks, at low temperature just before potting. The result with Ace suggests that bulbs of this variety require slightly more cold storage than do Croft for bloom at the same time."

Where facilities are available and the climate is satisfactory, the bulbs can be potted without cold storage, held in the cold frame, and finished in the greenhouse. The exact procedure would have to be worked out at each location. It is worthy of note that the Ace and Croft bulbs held in the cold-frame for the additional period from November 30 until December 29 showed a reduction in bud count of slightly more than one per plant and a delay in blooming of about a week."

Easter of 1947

"Since Easter in 1947 will be early (April 6) it is probably advisable to pot Croft bulbs early in December. They should be in storage at temperatures lower than 50 degrees for five or six weeks before being potted. The available information indicated that Ace bulbs should be stored somewhat longer than Croft bulbs

(when storage period is less than eight weeks) in order to produce blooms at the same time for both varieties."

Function of NW Crofts

Croft lilies grown in the Pacific northwest are suited primarily for pot culture. Moreover, their development in the field is nicely synchronized with the average Easter season. These factors have contributed to give them an enviable reputation as Easter lilies. This reputation is achieved, however, before the advent of "acceleration." If Croft lilies grown in the Pacific northwest are dug eight weeks after reaching full bloom, packed in moist peat, held at 65 degrees, during distribution, potted as soon as received and placed in cold frames or cool-houses until they are brought in at the end of the year for forcing, they should perform in a perfectly satisfactory manner. This was borne out by the experiences of local florists who obtained their bulbs direct from the growers, and followed the above procedure.

Let the forcers accelerate lilies if they so desire. However, they should be aware of the price they must pay, in the loss of bud count when they do. Southern-grown lilies mature early (June), hence must be stored for a long period if they are to be forced for Easter. Storage, regardless of temperature, is an unnatural condition at best and results in deterioration and low bud count.

Age and Low Bud Count

Another possible cause of low bud count may be at the age of the bulbs being forced. The demand for lily bulbs has resulted in the sale of large numbers of 6s for forcing purposes. Many growers have learned how they can produce size in their bulbs

by intelligent use of fertilizers, cover crops, and generally good cultural practices. Since the bulbs are sold on the basis of size, it naturally follows that yearlings have doubtless found their way to the forcers' benches. The performance of such bulbs in the hands of many forcers would be open to question. It is interesting to note that where the bulbs are planted in the field, they will bloom satisfactorily the next year.

Croft lily bulbs grown in the Pacific northwest should be reserved primarily for the Easter trade. It is the end for which they are best fitted by nature. For results in keeping with their reputation, they should be left in the ground eight weeks following full bloom, packed in moist peat, and held at approximately 65 degrees during distribution. As soon as received by the florist they should be potted and placed in cold frames or cool houses where they will have an opportunity to establish themselves before being forced.

If the forcer does not have the facilities for doing this, then the bulbs can be accelerated by placing them in cool storage (50 degrees or less) for five to six weeks just prior to potting. If the forcer would familiarize himself with the conditions prevailing in nature where the bulbs grow, he could appreciate that these manipulations are merely devices to provide the bulbs with a favorable environment during the critical period between the field and the forcers' bench.

The grower, distributor or forcer must all fulfill their respective responsibilities if the Easter lily crop is to attain desired performance.

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