



# Lotus

## Nelumbo nucifera

### **Planting, Dividing, & Care**

*For more information about the  
Colorado Water Garden Society  
or other aspects of pond keeping along the front-range go to:*

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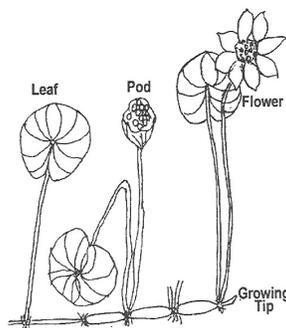
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Lotus are sun-loving plants and will not do well with less than 6 hours of direct sun. Lotus are Winter-hardy in Colorado, if they are not allowed to freeze or dry out, and may be overwintered in the same manner as your hardy lilies.

Lotus flowers range in size from 2" – 3" miniatures to plants with blooms over 1' in diameter. All form seed pods sought after in dried flower arrangements.

Lotus are quite hardy, aggressive, somewhat invasive, and may take over the pond if not contained properly. It is important to grow them in containers without holes.

Lotus grow in a linear fashion, with a sequence of a tuber producing a leaf and perhaps a flower, then beginning another tuber to repeat the cycle . . . Tuber, leaf, flower, tuber, leaf, flower, etc. Each terminal point produces a single leaf and flower and then sends out the next, new growth. Beneath the soil, lotus growth takes on one of two forms: runners and tubers. The Summer "runner" growth is thin and long (to 24"+).



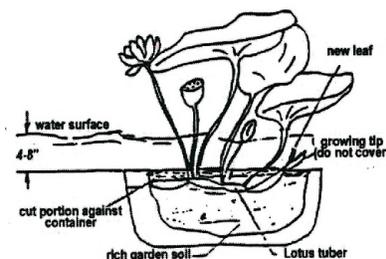
The Autumn “banana tuber” growth is thick, short (4” – 10”), and up to 2” in diameter, tapering at the ends. With lotus plants, the most recent growth called the “tip” is notoriously brittle, sensitive to breakage, and it is crucial to the plant. Should it be broken or bruised, the lotus cannot grow and will die.

Due to the fragility of lotus tips and the necessary “banana tuber” form, lotus are best divided and/or shipped in the early Spring. In Zone 5, this time is between the middle of March and the end of April when the tubers are still dormant, as they become quickly unmanageable once they start growing.

The tubers should arrive or be harvested with 1 or 2 complete tubers and the remainder of another. The entire tuber supporting the growing tip must not be harmed, but any preceding tubers may be trimmed away, if necessary, to allow the remainder to fit into the pot. To do so, trim the tuber about 1” away from the terminal of the retained growth.

## Planting

To plant lotus, the tuber should be placed with the cut portion against the container and the growing end pointing towards the center. Choose a container large enough to allow 4” – 6” from the end of the “tip” to the other side for growth. Cover the tuber with 1” of loam or heavy clay soil and hold it in place by putting a brick or rock over the tuber. The growing tip should protrude from the soil.



Round pots are preferred as lotuses conform to the shape of their pot as they grow. Ideal containers are usually 16” to 24” in diameter or larger. A square or rectangular container is okay, but lotus may grow into the corner, deforming the tuber. Miniatures will do well in containers of 8” – 12” and generally the larger the container, the better the lotus will do. For optimal growth, the water depth over the soil should be 4” – 8”.

Soil for lotus should be as rich as possible, with some clay, and heavy enough so it does not loosen or float.

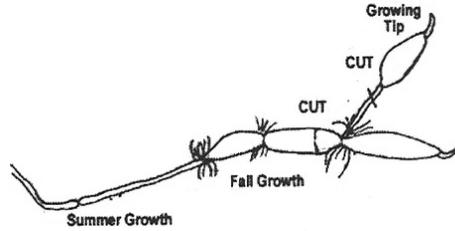
## Fertilization

Lotus should be fed every 3 weeks with 2 or 3 fertilizer tablets, placed about 4” from the newest 2 or 3 leaves. A single tablet near the older leaves will assist in proper tuber production.

A single tuber with a growing tip will produce flowers the first Summer under normal conditions.

## Dividing Lotus

Lotus will need to be divided about every two years. Lotuses grow their tubers in a mass and tangle very well. When it is time to divide the lotus, the soil must be gently removed from the tubers, and the tubers separated in a manner to provide a “banana tuber” for each growing tip. A stream of water from a hose helps in the process. Again, be careful not to damage the tip. The thin “Summer” tubers should be discarded and only the “banana tubers” retained. Retain as much growth on the division as will fit into the pot.



## Growing From Seed

Lotus can be easily grown from seeds obtained from dried pods frequently used for flower arraignments or purchased on the internet. First, the hard seed shell must be scarified or sanded until the white interior is visible. Second, add the seed to a glass of warm water in a sunny location, changing the water regularly. Finally, when the sprout is approximately 2" – 3" long, about 1 - 2 weeks after immersion, plant the seed in a starter pot with loose soil until at least one leaf is at or above the surface of the water. Once a good leaf is established, the seedling can be carefully transferred to a more suitable pot as described previously.

## History

The lotus has been a staple of cultures in temperate regions in countries such as Egypt, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, and China for thousands of years. They have been raised for food as well as ornamental and religious reasons. The seeds can be eaten before they are mature by peeling off the seed cover. The thick tubers are frequently added to oriental dishes. Often mature seeds are used in jewelry and other ornamentation.

## Varieties of Lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*)

There are nearly 100 varieties of *Nelumbo* in existence today. Below are the common ones that are readily available:

Miniature varieties for small ponds or large containers. These varieties rise an average 1 ½' - 2 ½' in height above soil and include:

- *Nelumbo nucifera* 'Momo Botan' - double flowers, deep rose petals, and yellow centers
- *Nelumbo nucifera* 'Shirokunshi' - pure white, tulip-shaped flowers

Medium varieties are 2 ½' – 5' in height and include:

- *Nelumbo nucifera* 'Empress' - striking white, single flower with deep pink edges
- *Nelumbo nucifera* 'Roseum Plenum' - very large, double, pink-rose flowers

Large lotus can reach heights greater than 5'. Varieties in this category include:

- *Nelumbo nucifera* 'Lutea' - the only native North American lotus, has single large, yellow flowers
- *Nelumbo nucifera* 'Mrs. Perry D. Slocum' - large flowers, changing from deep pink to creamy yellow
- *Nelumbo nucifera* 'Perry's Giant Sunburst' - very large, yellow flowers