

# Lily Of the Valley

Lily of the Valley are low growing plants which come up year after year in May time for about three weeks. They are grown for their delicate white flowers which are beautifully scented. Their Latin name is *Convallaria majalis*. Pink flowered varieties have been bred but their inferior scent has made them a poor second choice to the original.

Use the checklist below to decide if Lily of the Valley is suited to your preferences and garden conditions:

- They grow to roughly 30cm / 1ft high, the leaves first appearing in late March to early April
- Masses of small flowers appear throughout May. Each individual flower is small but overall they provide a carpet of flowers for three weeks or so. They are highly scented.
- The leaves die down in October November time.
- Lily of the Valley require ground which is moist throughout their growing season. They grow in all types of ground from clay to sandy soils.
- They prefer shade or semi-shade and thrive under the canopy of trees and large shrubs which provide dappled shade.
- Left to their own devices they will spread easily although they can be kept in check by removing plants which have spread too far.
- They are low maintenance if the soil is naturally kept moist.
- All parts of the plant are poisonous when eaten, deer know this and generally keep well away from them.
- They make good cut flowers but only last for two to three days.
- They can successfully be grown in containers.
- They are fully hardy in all parts of the UK down to -22°C / -11°F.

## HOW AND WHEN TO PLANT LILY OF THE VALLEY

Planting from pots is the most reliable method as described below

- Choose a shady to partial shade position. Somewhere where the soil is normally moist but not waterlogged.
- If the soil is heavy or is not free draining add lots of well rotted compost to the area and dig it in well.
- It can be planted all year long if the soil is not frozen and you can water well when conditions are dry. Mid March to April and mid September to October are the best times to plant potted Lily of the Valley.
- Dig a hole twice the width of the rootball. Sprinkle in a handful of blood, fish and bone and work into the ground.
- Place the plant into the hole, filling in with soil so that it is at the same depth as was in the pot. Fill around the rootball and firm the soil down gently but firmly. Water well to settle the surrounding ground around the rootball.

- Choose the position carefully. In ideal conditions Lily of the Valley can be very invasive. They are easily dug up but if they grow amongst other plants they can be almost impossible to eradicate.

Follow the steps below when planting bare-roots / pips:

- Soak the roots / pips in water for half an hour before planting
- Dig a hole which just a little larger than the roots to be planted. Choose a shady, slightly moist site
- Place the roots in the hole so that the top of the roots are half a centimetre below the soil surface. There is no top or bottom, just place them in the hole
- Sprinkle loose earth over the roots gently working it in to fill the root mass with soil. Cover the top so that the roots / pips are just below the surface.
- Sprinkle in a handful of blood, fish and bone and work into the ground. Water well.

## CARE OF LILY OF THE VALLEY

The key need of Lily of the Valley is a moist but not waterlogged soil. This is the reason why they do best in partial shade. Don't let them dry out, they are unlikely to recover.

They require little or no feeding. In their natural surroundings they do fine from the fallen leaves of overhanging trees and shrubs. Certainly, do not feed with nitrogen rich fertilisers, this will only encourage leaf growth at the expense of flowers.

They do not need to be pruned (let the leaves to rot down over winter) unless they become invasive.

## GROWING LILY OF THE VALLEY IN CONTAINERS

Lily of the valley can be grown in containers and pots but they do need a very regular supply of water which can be a real problem in the summer. They are not drought resistant, quite the opposite in fact.

The root system of a lily of the valley is quite extensive so choose a deeper pot than you would normally use for other bulbs plants. Make sure it has good drainage holes in the bottom. Fill it with multi-purpose compost and set the roots and pips into the soil so that the pips are just below the surface.

Water well to settle the plants in and place in a shady or part shade position. A handful of blood fish and bone scattered around the plants in March and August will be fine as far as feeding is concerned. After they have flowered in May time don't remove the leaves because they will absorb sunlight for the next five or six months preparing themselves for flowering the next year. Yellowed leaves can be removed if you want to tidy up.

## PESTS AND DISEASES OF LILY OF THE VALLEY

Lily of the Valley are strong growing plants and are rarely attacked by pests. Sometimes, but not often they can suffer from leaf spot.

## HOW AND WHEN TO PROPAGATE LILY OF THE VALLEY

They can either be propagated by seeds or by division. Growing this plant from seed is not particularly easy and may not produce a replica of the parent plant.

The best way to propagate Lily of the Valley is by division, it's almost foolproof. In autumn time dig up a clump of the plants with a trowel or fork and if they have been there for a few years they will be congested. Simply tease away a few roots which have pips (small swellings on the roots where new plants will grow from) on them and plant them in a new position as described [above](#).