EASTER LILIES

Next Easter comes much earlier than it has in the past two years. As a result of this fact, we have to be aware of certain dates to insure bringing our lily crop in at the time when prices are most favorable.

To insure hitting the right market with your lilies, the bulbs should be planted between December 15 and 18, and certainly not later than December 21. The grace period is between December 15 and December 21, for those of you who are snowed under with last minute Christmas orders. The dates are early, but so is Easter and more time must be allowed for flowering of the lilies.

In 1954, an experiment was initiated by members of the Floriculture Section at N. C. State College to study the effects of delayed potting dates on lily plants, the bulbs of which were stored for different lengths of time at room temperature (75° F). Upon receipt of the lily bulbs in 1954, some were potted immediately and others potted on subsequent dates. The remaining bulbs were left unpotted and stored in the potting room, where the temperature was 75° F. As a result of this handling of the bulbs, those which were potted immediately upon arrival, forced more uniformly, and required less temperature manipulation to achieve uniformity of crop. The bulbs stored in the potting room, unpotted, at 75° F., showed wide ranges of growth and naturally were a lot harder to bring in at a specific date. Picture (1 & 2) clearly emphasizes this lack of uniformity.

A third batch of these same bulbs were placed in storage at 31° F. and potted on January 5. Picture 3, clearly illustrates the desirability of such a practice. The stored bulbs were much more uniform than the bulbs which were immediately potted. (Compare picture 3 with picture 1). All bulbs used in the three phases of the experiment, were grown at 60–65° F. throughout the length of the experiment.

The potting dates for the experiment were spaced 3 days apart, beginning December 15, through December 29, 1954. Variation in growth was evident in the bulbs planted on December 21. This date was the breaking point for a greater difference in uniformity (see Picture 4). The variation in uniformity was directly proportional to the number of days of delayed potting. One other very important fact was evident as a result of this experiment and that was – the effects of pre–cooled lily bulbs was destroyed when pre–cooled bulbs were stored unpotted for 5 days or more at room temperatures.

Bud count was similarily affected as a result of this delayed potting experiment. The bud count of lilies potted on December 15 averaged 5.5 buds, and the bud count on the final potting, December 29, averaged 3 per plant. The bulbs stored at 31 F., showed no reduction in bud count, and showed the same number of buds as the December 15 potting.

As a result of this evidence the following recommendations can be made at this time:

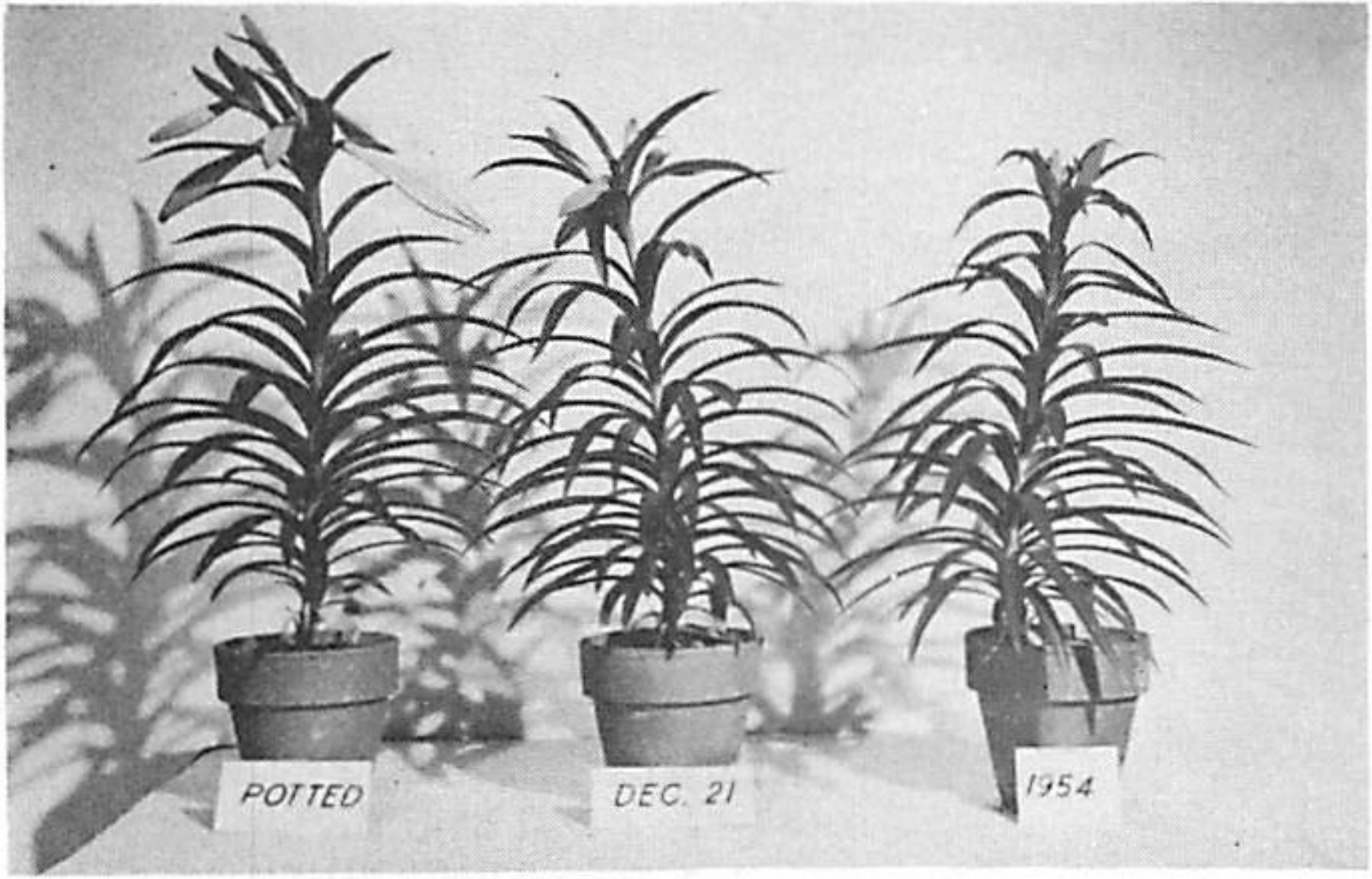
1. When bulbs are received, pot them immediately, or not later than 5 days after receiving the bulbs.
2. If bulbs are received earlier than you expect, and before the correct potting date, store the bulbs in a refrigerator where the temperature is not lower than 31° F. and not higher than 45° F.
3. Keep bulbs in refrigerated storage until you are ready to pot the bulbs.

By following correct potting dates, and proper handling of lily bulbs after they are received you can eliminate a source of trouble which could develop as the lily plants mature. A more uniform crop, means a better break on prices received for your Easter lilies.

Pic. 1. Dec. 15 Bulbs received and potted. No delay in potting.

Pic. 2. Dec. 29 Bulbs received and held 15 days at room temperature (75°).

Pic. 3. Bulbs received and held at 31° storage. Potted Jan. 5.



Pic. 4. Dec. 21 Date at which variation in uniformity showed significantly.