

ROOTS

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To a plant, roots are most important. Without them it will wither and die. Roots support the plant by anchoring it in its place, but most importantly they have the ability to absorb nutrients and water.

In pot culture, the grower can readily observe the roots of his plants by knocking the plant from its pot. The roots of most plants should be white (figure 1) and have fine root hairs. If the roots are discolored or appear to be diseased, appropriate corrective action can be taken to keep the crop growing.



Figure 1--Easter lily roots do not usually form as thick a mat on the soil surface in plastic pots (right) as they do in clay.

The Easter lily is one crop which frequently has root problems. Without good roots, the grower cannot bring the plant into flower on time. If growing lilies, make it a point to knock out a few plants each week and observe the root health. If something is wrong with the roots it can be seen.

Lilies have basal roots which carry the plant about 2/3 of the way from potting to flower. At about eight weeks before flowering, stem roots develop. At this time, many basal roots may die or are killed by pathogens, overwatering, or salts.

Many lilies have been finished on stem roots alone. This year why not make it a point to keep more of the roots healthy by observing their pattern of growth and color. By looking for problems which can injure your crop and by proper soil treatment, healthy roots can be maintained. And check your soil periodically with a soil test.