

Nelumbo nucifera Lotus, Sacred Lotus¹

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Introduction

Lotus is a non-native aquatic plant requiring plenty of space and a full sun location to thrive. It is nothing less than spectacular in bloom, the soft pink blossom up to 8 inches across, opening on top of a stiff stalk emerging directly from below the water. The easily recognized, large fruit structure develops as the flower opens and turns brown when the flower fades and the petals fall into the water. Leaves are enormous, sometimes reaching 2 feet across. The fruit is often used by professional florists in dried arrangements.



Figure 1. Full Form - *Nelumbo nucifera*: Lotus, Sacred Lotus
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Flower - *Nelumbo nucifera*: Lotus, Sacred Lotus
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

General Information

Scientific name: *Nelumbo nucifera*

Pronunciation: nee-LUM-boe noo-SIFF-fer-ruh

Common name(s): lotus, sacred lotus

Family: *Nelumbonaceae*

Plant type: aquatic plant

USDA hardiness zones: 5 through 10 (Figure 3)

Planting month for zone 7: year-round

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Planting month for zone 8: year-round

Planting month for zone 9: year-round

Planting month for zone 10: year-round

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: potentially invasive

Uses: water garden

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 5 to 8 feet

Spread: 4 to 8 feet

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: open

Growth rate: fast

Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: most emerge from the soil, usually without a stem

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: undulate

Leaf shape: orbiculate

Leaf venation: palmate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 18 to 36 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: orange; yellow

Flower characteristic: summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: round

Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristic: persists on the plant

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: not applicable

Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; grows submerged in water

Drought tolerance:

Soil salt tolerances: unknown

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Lotus plants are extremely aggressive and should be planted into containers in the water garden to keep them from escaping and permanently rooting into the soil beneath the water. Once they become established in the soil, they are difficult to get rid of. Containerizing plants is a good way to enjoy lotus without the danger of them becoming invasive in the pond or lake.

Lotus should be planted in a container filled with garden soil or potting mix. A shallow and wide container is better than a tall, narrow container. The garden soil can be mixed with one-fifth well-decomposed cow manure. Incorporate fertilizer at an equivalent rate of about one-quarter cup 10-10-10 per gallon of soil or media to help stimulate growth. Before filling the container, place a small plastic bag filled with sand at the bottom to keep it from floating in the pond. Plant the rhizome at the edge of the container so it can grow horizontally across the top. Place a 1 or 2 inch layer of sand or gravel over the top of the media after the rhizome is planted in the pot to keep media and soil in the container. Lower the container into 6 inches of water until growth begins. Then it can be set so the bottom of the container is no more than 18 inches below the water surface. If the water is too deep, place a brick or concrete block under the container. Do not construct containers from treated lumber since growth could be severely inhibited.

Small cultivars are better suited for a smaller garden and could include 'Momo Boton' with rose-colored flowers and smaller leaves than the species. The native lotus, *Nelumbo lutea* has light yellow flowers and is hardy into USDA hardiness zone 4.