

Planting Instructions for Showy Ladyslippers

(*Cypripedium Reginae*)

Showy ladyslippers are easy to grow in common garden loam as long as the following requirements are satisfied:

- (1) They need plenty of bright light but they will not tolerate direct afternoon sun.
- (2) They should not be planted where they will be invaded by the roots of other plants.
- (3) The soil must be very rich in organic matter and moisture-retentive but not be soggy.
- (4) Acidic soils should be sweetened with dolomitic limestone.
- (5) The plants should be mulched year-round with a layer of rich compost.

Assuming that you are starting out with good garden loam:

Prepare a hole about 3 feet wide and 12 inches deep. Discard all the subsoil and then remove enough material from the hole so that the final grade is 4 inches below the surrounding soil. Incorporate enough organic matter to bring the planting hole up to grade. The best organic matter for this is course material such as half-rotted leaves or old hardwood bark mixed with compost.

Showy ladyslippers thrive in sweet soil. Unless you live in one of the limestone regions of Vt, you can assume that your soil is somewhat acidic. Add enough pulverized hi-magnesium (dolomitic) limestone to raise the pH to around neutral (7.0). Do not attempt to grow showies beneath conifers of any kind.

After the hole is prepared, push aside enough of the soil mixture so you can lay the bare root plants in the hole with the roots fanned out horizontally like the spokes of a wheel, about 3 inches below the surrounding soil. Then cover the roots and crowns with the material you have set aside. Mulch, as explained below, and water deeply.

Ladyslippers have a wiry root system, which does not hold a root ball together very well. When you take the plant out of the pot, expect the potting mix to fall away from the roots. Bare-rooting young plants is an acceptable practice during any stage of growth, but it is important that the roots are not allowed to dry out. If your new plants are in lush growth, transplant in the cool of the evening or on a rainy day.

Young plants should be set no closer than 2 feet apart. Under ideal conditions, you will eventually need at least 3 feet between vigorous old clumps.

Showy ladyslippers should be mulched year-round with a layer of rich compost. The compost breaks down slowly and supplies the plants with a constant source of nutrients. It is best to apply a 2 to 3 inch layer in the early spring. Apply a dusting of high-mag limestone once a year before you apply the compost.

Ladyslippers do not need fertilizer, but if your plants seem to be lacking in vigor after a few years, you might try low doses of compost tea or fish emulsion. Do not use any form of concentrated fertilizer, organic or chemical.

During periods of hot dry weather, ladyslippers that are getting a lot of direct sunshine will need an occasional soaking. This is especially important in June when the plants are flushing new growth. A soaker hose, laid on top of the mulch for a few hours, is ideal.

Moving Ladyslipper Clumps

If in the future, you wish to move clumps of ladyslippers, you will find that their root systems are shallow and compact and easy to handle. But you must remember that the roots do not regenerate from cut ends and you must not hack around the plants with a shovel. You will be amazed how simple it is to ease the plants out of the ground by exposing the roots with your fingers and gently levering the root mass from underneath with a flat spade. Old clumps can be moved at any time except when they are flushing growth and flowering simultaneously in June. Make sure they are well watered before and after they are moved.

Other Species and Hybrids

Yellow Ladyslippers: These are less demanding than the showies. They are more shade-loving and require less organic matter in the soil. Although they do not require to be constantly fed with compost, they do appreciate a year-round organic mulch. Their roots penetrate more deeply than the showies and they require less irrigation. They do however require limy soil.

Kentucky Ladyslippers: Unlike the showy ladyslippers, these do not like large amounts of organic matter in the soil and they do not need to be fed continually with compost. The Kentuckies do not require such sweet soil and so reduce the amount of lime you incorporate into the soil.

Hybrid Cypripediums: We do not have enough personal experience with these in our gardens to be able to offer solid advice. Take into consideration the parents and treat as best you can. As with all cultivated cyps, it is advisable to start out with good organic soil unencumbered with tree roots and a site which offers plenty of bright light but with no direct sun after noon. Always maintain a year-round organic mulch.

Please contact us with any questions you might have about ladyslippers

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