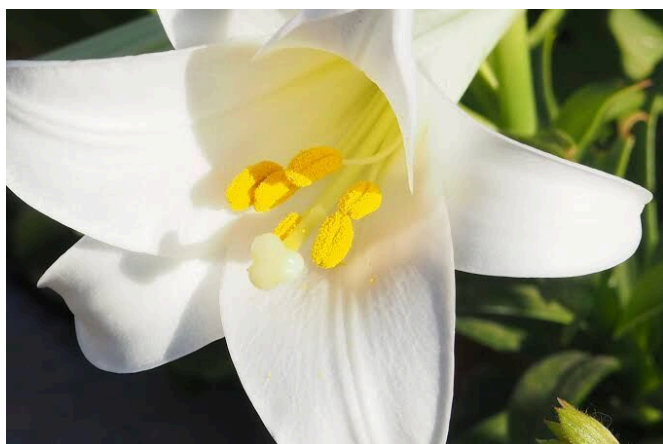


Long-time Lily Grower Preps Up for a Busy Easter Weekend

April 17, 2025



Easter Sunday falls on April 20 this year. As they have done for last 45 years, Smith River Lily growers Rob and Kara Miller take a huge sigh of relief after thousands of boxes of Easter Lilies reached their destination for families who celebrate this holiday. The Millers' Easter Lily farm is Dahlstrom and Watt bulb farm. Indeed, the Easter Lily greenhouse grower and field bulb farmer is just one of the of the depleting roster of Lily growers remaining in Del Norte County; the others are Palmer/ Westbrook and United Lily Growers:

the Crockett family. This trio harvests and distributes the bulbs to greenhouses across the United States and Canada to flower for Easter. “80 percent of the lilies in North America and Canada come from the Smith River Valley. This totals more than \$6 million annually,” says Rob Miller.

Miller underscored the trials and travails of producing this magnificent product which must be available in the store or greenhouse by Easter Sunday. The things that can go wrong can fill a telephone book.

“It’s what I do,” harkens Miller. “...and it’s tough.”

Lilies and Easter have been around Del Norte County since the late 40’S. In 1966, Bob Miller, Sr. bought into Dahlstrom and Watt when Cecil Watt retired. 12 years later, Rob Miller came out of UC Davis and joined his Dad in owning and managing Dahlstrom and Watt. Rob and Kara’s son Kurt is the greenhouse manager.

Over the decades, demand for the all white, trumpet flower, religious symbol honoring Jesus Christ has been slowly decreasing.

“In 1966, there were 26 lily growers from Salem and McKinleyville. Now, there are just three,”

says Miller. In total, the trio grows about 200 acres on Del Norte County. Rob and Kara operate their farm on six acres of covered greenhouses.

The life of a lily at Easter is perhaps a 10 to 20 day flower, but the bulb can be replanted and the flower will re-bloom, next year.

Bob Miller, Sr. and family came from the Mid-West, where he was a professor doing Horticulture research at Ohio State University. Senior passed away two years ago at 92.

The growers in the greenhouse anticipate everything culminating on Easter Sunday and that date changes annually.

Rob explained the Lily cycle. The cycle begins with bulb planting in the Fall. Both small bulbs and/ or scales are planted. Scales are the specialized leaves designed for food storage that are attached to the basal plate which together make up the bulb. When separated and planted, a small bulb will grow at its base. It can take two to three years for a saleable bulb to be produced. Each year after planting, everything is dug up and sorted, the commercials are packed and sold and everything else is replanted for another year of growth. When the plant is ready, it is packed and shipped to greenhouse growers around the nation who force the bulbs to produce flowers for Easter. The natural cycle of the plant blooms in July in the fields in Smith River.

What can go wrong in the process? Plenty.

Putting small pieces of fleshy bulbs into the soil in late summer and hoping one has something amazing A year later after 80 inches of rain, soil and airborne fungi, bacteria, nematodes (worms), freezes, gophers and government oversight is truly an act of faith and a highly regarded agricultural methodology. The Triplicate asked Rob, no spring chicken himself, why he toils with the Easter Lily, he responded, “ It’s what I do.”

And Rob Miller does it so very well. Happy Easter, everyone.