

When and How to Divide Lily of the Valley Plants

Divide Lily of the Valley when Plants become Crowded for more Blooms next Season

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Unlike lilies that point upward allowing admirers easy views of their stamen, lily of the valley lilies hang over and swing in the wind like free ringing bells. Botanically named *convallaria majalis*, lily of the valley is a perennial plant that grows from pips. Lily pips are small rootstocks that grow in upright positions. Gardeners must access the pips when they divide lily of the valley plants.

Lily of the valley white bell shaped flowers grow basally – meaning from bases of stems. The bell shaped flowers are scalloped, bloom in spring, shine with waxy appearances, and smell light and aromatic.

Lily of the valley plants reach heights of only six to ten inches and their basal leaves, despite their broadness, do not require a lot of growing space. Their small size makes lily of the valley great flowering plants to use as accents for taller growing plants such as camellias and rhododendrons. Lily of the valley plants make great ground cover in partially shaded areas and grow well in pots – including small pots.

Lily of the valley plants prefer rich humus filled soil (Humus soil contains animal and plant decay.) and average watering as long as they are not left to dry out. Gardeners can use peat moss, leaf mold, or ground bark to maintain moisture.

The best time to plant lily of the valley for gardeners living in zones 4-7 and in zones 14-20 is during months of November and December. Gardeners in zones 1-3 should plant pips or clumps in September or October.

Dividing lily of the valley eventually becomes necessary because bloom numbers decrease when rootstocks become too crowded. Since dividing lily of the valley requires digging their rootstocks from the ground, and no gardener wants to lose blossoms about to bloom or already in bloom, it is best to wait until blossoms and leaves fade before dividing the rootstocks.

Once flower and leaf fading occur, carefully cut into ground around lily of the valley roots. Allow gardening tool to reach six to eight inches into soil around rootstocks to prevent from cutting into plant bases. Lift soil and roots from ground and then, using a sharp gardening tool, divide roots by separating root balls or clumps into smaller pieces (pips).

No hard and fast rule exists that insist rootstock separation requires leaving a certain number of pips intact. Therefore, gardeners feel free to separate plants into as many pieces as they want for the number of pips present. In other words, separate rootstocks into single pip pieces, double pip pieces, or triple pip pieces, etcetera. Let areas in which pips are to be transplanted dictate the number of separations to make.

When planting lily of the valley in clumps, allow one to two feet of space between plantings. When planting single pips, however, space pips four to five inches apart. Planting depths should reach about one and a half inches below soil surface.

Treat divided lily of the valley as you would larger root balls as far as after planting care is concerned and look forward to admiring more blooms during the next lily of the valley blossoming season.