

# Agapanthus

Agapanthus spp (Lily of the Nile) are tropical plants native to South Africa. Their flowers are ball shaped umbels of helicoid cymes called a bostryx, a rare flower form in which the flowers open sequentially over a period of time rather than all at once. Agapanthus are available in various shades of blue or white. Some rebloom throughout the summer ('Peter Pan' and the deep blue 'Royal Ama') and some bloom for a limited four to five weeks. The flower stalks may be up to five feet tall or be less than one foot ('Lilliput'). The individual flowers may be drooping or be angled outward on the umbel. Agapanthus leaves are long, smooth and straplike in shape.

Keep Agapanthus outdoors as long as possible in the fall because they need a cold period in order to flower well the next season. However, do not subject your plants to heavy frost (28°F). Winter Agapanthus indoors in a cool location with bright light such as in a mudroom, by a window in a garage that does not freeze, or in a room that is kept cool (45°F - 55° F) during the winter months. We do not recommend the dark environment of the cellar!\* Keep your Agapanthus on the dry side, watering perhaps once a month. If plants are kept too warm during the winter they will force into bloom before summer. Keep them away from heat sources such as radiators and wood stoves. Although most Agapanthus will not be dormant during the winter, neither will they be in active growth. Reduce watering and do not fertilize during this time. In the spring, after danger of frost has passed, place your Agapanthus outdoors, gradually moving them from part sun to full sun, and begin watering and fertilizing regularly.

Overgrown plants are best divided in late summer, after they have bloomed. The roots are thick and fleshy. To divide, remove the Agapanthus from its container and try prying the fans apart with two garden forks wedged back to back. If this fails, use a machete or other large knife to cut the fans apart. This process is not for the faint of heart.

\*We have a customer who does successfully winter her Agapanthus in a cool dark basement, giving it only one watering during the winter. The leaves dry out and die back completely. She brings the plant out to a cold sun porch in early April and then begins a watering and fertilizing regimen. When outdoor temperatures have warmed up enough she moves her plant outside.

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