



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## *Nelumbo nucifera*<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

Lotus is a non-native aquatic plant requiring plenty of space and a full sun location to thrive (Fig. 1). 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.

### General Information

**Scientific name:** *Nelumbo nucifera*

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

**Common name(s):** Lotus

**Family:** *Nymphaeaceae*

**Plant type:** aquatic plant

**USDA hardiness zones:** 5 through 10 (Fig. 2)

**Planting month for zone 7:** year round

**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

**Uses:** water garden

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

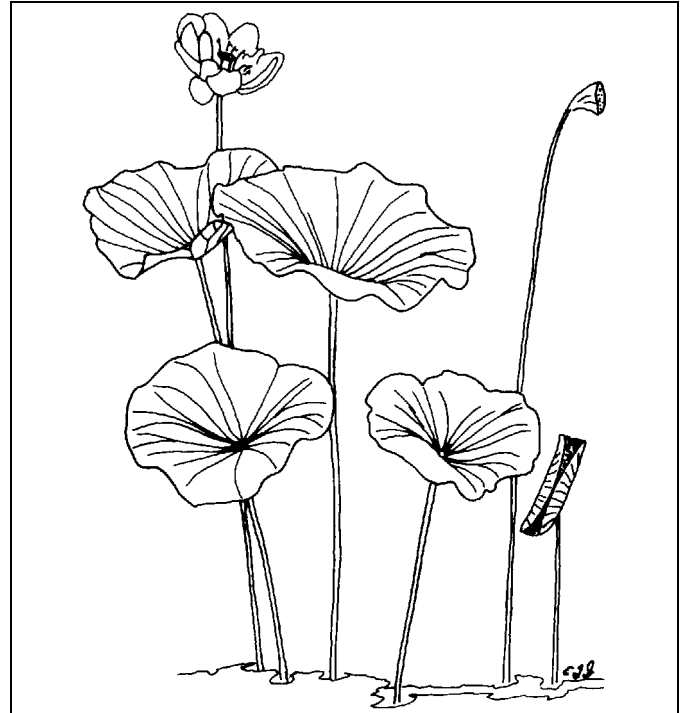


Figure 1. Lotus.

**Spread:** 4 to 8 feet

**Plant habit:** upright

**Plant density:** open

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** coarse

### Description

**Height:** 5 to 8 feet

1. This document is Fact Sheet FPS-424, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October, 1999 Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**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

**Invasive potential:** potentially invasive

**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 shape 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 of the container to keep the container 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.