**Introduction**

Mexican Waterlily is a hardy, native plant that floats its round foliage and produces a fragrant, multipetaled, white flower just above the water (Fig. 1). It was abundant throughout Florida until the introduction of Water Hyacinth which has crowded out the Waterlilies. Control measures that reduce the Water Hyacinth population should help waterlilies grow back and become more prominent. Each leaf of the Waterlily lasts about 6 weeks before turning yellow. This is normal and should not be cause for concern. Flower showiness is legendary and each flower lasts several days, but flowers close in late afternoon and at night. Fragrant Waterlily grows in standing water about 18 inches deep and spreads by means of rhizomes. It can be prevented from spreading by planting it in a container without drainage holes and submerging the container into the water garden. This helps prevent the plant from invading the entire water garden. Although Waterlilies require full sun for best flowering, this one will produce some flowers with only 4 hours of direct sun.

**General Information**

- **Scientific name:** Nymphaea mexicana
- **Pronunciation:** nim-FEE-uh meck-sick-KAY-nuh
- **Common name(s):** Mexican Waterlily, Yellow Waterlily
- **Family:** Nymphaeaceae
- **Plant type:** aquatic plant
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 3 through 11 (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 and 11:** year round
- **Origin:** native to Florida
- **Uses:** cut flowers; attracts butterflies
- **Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

**Description**

Figure 1. Mexican Waterlily.

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**Nymphaea mexicana -- Mexican Waterlily**

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Height:** .5 to 1 feet  
**Spread:** 2 to 4 feet  
**Plant habit:** not applicable  
**Plant density:** open  
**Growth rate:** fast  
**Texture:** medium

**Foliage**

- **Leaf arrangement:** most emerge from the soil, usually without a stem  
- **Leaf type:** simple  
- **Leaf margin:** entire  
- **Leaf shape:** orbiculate  
- **Leaf venation:** palmate  
- **Leaf type and persistence:** evergreen  
- **Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches  
- **Leaf color:** green  
- **Fall color:** no fall color change  
- **Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

- **Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristic:** pleasant fragrance; summer flowering; fall flowering; spring flowering

**Fruit**

- **Fruit shape:** unknown  
- **Fruit length:** unknown  
- **Fruit cover:** unknown  
- **Fruit color:** unknown  
- **Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

**Trunk and Branches**

- **Trunk/bark/branches:** not applicable  
- **Current year stem/twig color:** not applicable  
- **Current year stem/twig thickness:** not applicable

**Culture**

- **Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun  
- **Soil tolerances:** grows submerged in water  
- **Drought tolerance:**  
- **Soil salt tolerances:** poor
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: not known to be invasive
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Hardy Waterlilies 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 is no more than 18 inches below the 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.

The only maintenance required is monthly application of a slow release fertilizer. Tablets manufactured by various companies can be placed several inches below the sand or gravel layer at the top of the container. Follow the manufacturers directions to determine appropriate number of tablets.