

Yeovil Allotments Association

Birth Flowers for

July

Larkspur & Water Lily

Composited off the Internet

by

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How to Grow Larkspur from Seed

Larkspur is one of those flowers that makes a cottage garden feel truly complete. With its tall, elegant spires in shades of violet, blue, pink, white and deepest plum, it has a painterly quality — as though it belongs in a watercolour rather than an actual garden. The good news? It's wonderfully straightforward to grow, costs very little, and once you've grown it, you'll wonder how you ever managed without it.

This guide will walk you through everything you need to know, from sowing your first seeds to cutting great armfuls for the vase. Don't be daunted — larkspur is a friend to beginners and a joy to experienced gardeners alike.

When & How to Sow

Larkspur is a hardy annual, which means it can tolerate frost — and actually prefers a cold spell to help it germinate well. This

makes it ideal for direct sowing outdoors, and it really doesn't like having its roots disturbed, so sowing where it is to flower is absolutely the right approach.

You have two ideal sowing windows in the UK:

Autumn Sowing (September – October) —
Recommended

Sowing in autumn gives larkspur the cold stratification it loves. Seeds overwinter in the ground, germinate earlier in spring, and produce bigger, stronger plants that flower earlier and for longer. This is the method cottage gardeners have used for generations, and it really does give the best results.

Spring Sowing (February – April)

If you miss the autumn window, don't worry. Sow in early spring — February to April works well — ideally giving the seeds a few cold nights to help trigger germination. You can also pop the seed packet in the fridge for a week before sowing to mimic this cold period.

Step by step:

- 1. Choose your spot.** Larkspur likes a sunny or lightly shaded position with well-drained soil. It dislikes heavy, waterlogged ground — if your soil is clay-heavy, work in some grit or compost before sowing.
- 2. Prepare the soil.** Rake the area to a fine tilth (a crumbly, even texture). Remove any large stones or debris. Larkspur doesn't need rich soil — in fact, too much fertility can encourage leafy growth at the expense of flowers.
- 3. Sow thinly and directly.** Scatter seeds thinly across the surface or sow in shallow drills around 6mm deep. Try not to sow too densely — overcrowding leads to weaker plants and encourages mildew.
- 4. Label clearly.** This sounds obvious, but larkspur seedlings look much like weeds when they first emerge — a label will save you accidentally pulling them up!

5. **Water gently.** Use a watering can with a fine rose to avoid washing seeds away. Then leave them to it — larkspur germinates best with minimal fuss.

6. **Thin the seedlings.** Once they're a few centimetres tall and have their first true leaves, thin to around 20–30cm apart. It feels drastic, but the remaining plants will be all the better for it. You can compost the thinnings rather than transplanting, as larkspur really doesn't like being moved.

Beginner's Reassurance

Don't worry if germination feels slow — larkspur can take two to four weeks, sometimes longer in cold conditions. As long as the soil doesn't dry out completely, they'll come. Patience is rewarded beautifully here.

Growing On *Tips*

Once your larkspur seedlings are established, they're pleasingly low-maintenance. Here's what to keep an eye on through the growing season.

Watering

Water young seedlings regularly, especially during dry spells in spring. Once established, larkspur is reasonably drought-tolerant — water during prolonged dry periods but avoid keeping the soil constantly wet, which can lead to rot.

Feeding

Larkspur generally doesn't need feeding — it can actually perform better in leaner soils. If your soil is very poor, a single application of a balanced general fertiliser in spring will be more than enough. Avoid high-nitrogen feeds, which push leaves at the expense of flowers.

Support

Taller varieties — particularly those over 90cm — may benefit from a few twigs or bamboo canes pushed in around them for support, especially in more exposed gardens. This is worth

doing early before the plants get too tall. Shorter varieties are usually self-supporting in a sheltered spot.

Deadheading

Larkspur doesn't benefit from deadheading in the same way as some other flowers — it blooms on a central spike and then sets seed. If you want a longer display, let some plants seed naturally and cut others for the vase. You can allow plants to self-seed for a colony next year.

Self-Seeding Tip

One of larkspur's loveliest qualities is that it self-seeds freely. If you leave a few plants to set seed and drop naturally, you'll find a colony establishing itself over years — meaning you may barely need to sow at all. Just allow the seed heads to ripen and shake on the ground before you clear spent plants.

Common Problems & How to Fix Them

Larkspur is generally a tough, trouble-free plant, but here are the issues you're most likely to encounter and how to deal with them calmly.

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Poor germination	Seeds too warm, too old, or sown too deep	Sow shallowly (6mm max), ensure seeds are fresh, and try a cold spell before sowing — either autumn sowing or a week in the fridge first.
Powdery mildew on leaves	Poor air circulation, overcrowding, dry at roots	Thin plants to improve airflow, water at the base rather than overhead, and remove affected leaves. Mildew usually appears late in the season and rarely ruins the display entirely.
Slugs & snails	Moist conditions, young seedlings	Young seedlings are most vulnerable. Use organic slug pellets, copper tape, or set beer traps around the emerging plants. Once established, larkspur is less susceptible.
Tall, floppy plants	Too much shade, too much nitrogen, insufficient support	Choose a sunnier position next time, avoid rich feeds, and stake taller varieties early in the season with twigs or canes.
Plants not flowering	Too much shade, overcrowding, or late sowing	Ensure plants receive enough sun, thin to the recommended spacing, and try earlier sowing — either autumn or early spring — next year.
Sparse or small blooms	Overcrowding or over-feeding	Thin more aggressively (30cm between plants) and avoid feeding unless soil is very poor. Lean conditions produce the best flowering.

Important Note

All parts of the larkspur plant are toxic if ingested, so do wash your hands after handling and keep out of reach of young children and pets. This is worth knowing, but needn't put you off growing it — it's perfectly safe to grow and handle with simple care.

When to *Expect Flowers*

If you sow in autumn, you can expect larkspur to begin flowering from late May or June — sometimes even a little earlier in a mild year. Spring-sown plants will typically flower from late June through to August.

The display usually lasts around four to six weeks per plant, though a bed with a mix of autumn and spring-sown plants can give you a longer combined season. Once flowering is over, plants set seed and die — this is normal, and is just the signal to let them self-seed or collect seeds for next year.

JAN	
FEB	
MAR	Sowing window
APR	Sowing window
MAY	
JUN	Flowering period
JUL	Flowering period
AUG	Flowering period
SEP	
OCT	Sowing window
NOV	
DEC	

Succession Sowing

For the longest possible display, sow in both autumn and early spring. The two batches will flower at slightly different times, giving you a more extended season of colour and cutting material.

Cutting & Drying

Larkspur is one of the finest cut flowers a cottage garden can produce, and it dries beautifully too — making it a true double-duty plant for anyone who loves bringing the garden indoors.

For cutting fresh

Cut larkspur spires when around a third to half of the flowers on the stem are open — the remaining buds will continue to open in the vase, giving you days of enjoyment. Cut early in the morning when the stems are well hydrated, and place immediately into deep, cool water. Change the water every couple of days and snip the ends at an angle to extend vase life. You can expect fresh larkspur to last around five to eight days in a good condition.

For drying

Larkspur is genuinely one of the best flowers for drying — it holds its colour exceptionally well, with blues and purples in particular remaining vivid for months. Cut stems when most of the flowers on the spike are open but before they start to drop. Strip the lower leaves, bundle in small groups of five to ten stems, and hang upside down in a warm, dry, well-ventilated space away from direct sunlight. They'll be ready in two to three weeks.

Perfect For

Dried larkspur is wonderful in wreaths, dried flower arrangements, botanical frames, and as a pressed flower. It's also a popular choice for wedding flowers and handmade gifts — and because you've grown it yourself, it carries an extra layer of meaning.

Cutting Garden Tip

Regular cutting actually encourages larkspur to produce more side shoots and prolongs flowering. Don't be shy with the scissors — the more you cut, the more you get. Think of it as doing the plant a favour.



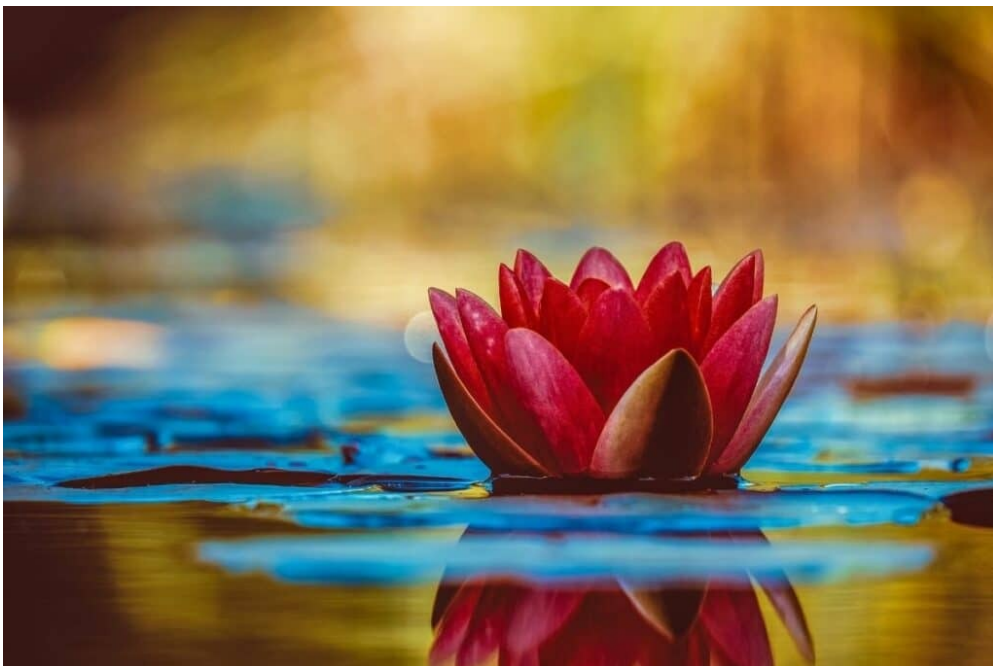
Water Lily

If you are a fan of water lilies, you've probably heard of the artist Monet. Even if you are not particularly familiar with the flower, you may have heard of his painting series called 'The Water Lilies', or 'Nymphéas'.

If someone could vouch for the beauty and versatility of the watery lily family, it was Monet.

His paintings depict thousands of water-topping flowers; their elegance, tranquility, their range of colors, and their beauty.

Alongside the French painter, hundreds of cultures and people around the world have been celebrating water lilies for centuries



Part of the reason behind their popularity is that water lilies are notoriously easy to grow, and can be found almost anywhere in the world.

Also, they have been around for hundreds of millions of years, so they are pretty impressive flowers.

Because these flowers are so impressively stunning, it is not surprising that people want to know more about them.

If you are thinking about growing your own water lilies in your garden pond, or if you just want to learn a little more about them, keep on reading!

We will discuss the different varieties of lily that are available, their colors, and show you what they look like.

Water Lily Families

Water lilies exist in three different family groups, and these are the Nymphaeaceae, the Hydatellaceae, and the Cabombaceae families.

Wow, they're a bit of a mouthful, aren't they? Within each of these three families are a set of subspecies, all of which are unique in color, shape, and size.

In total, there are over fifty species of water lily in the world.

Most species of water lilies fall into the Nymphaeaceae family.

The official names of the subspecies in this family are Barclaya, Nuphar, Ondinea, Victoria, Euryale, and Nymphaea.

However, there are so many subspecies within these groups that we will focus more on each flower's individual name.

Water Lily Colours



When you think of water lilies, you probably picture some light pink flowers atop light green lily pads, right? And you would not be wrong!

So many water lilies are light pink in color. However, what many people do not know is that water lilies exist in a whole range of colors and shades – there is at least one lily for every color of the rainbow!

As well as pink lilies, you can find yellow, orange, blue, purple, red, white, and even black lilies.

Even the colors of lily pads vary; and they can range from very light green to deep, dark green, and some are even red or

purple! Just like all flowers, water lilies come in a range of shapes, sizes, and colors, and each flower is unique.

Nymphaeaceae Water Lilies

Because this family of water lilies has the most subspecies, we are going to focus on the Nymphaeaceae family's subspecies in this article. Let's take a closer look at some of them below.

Nymphaea Darwin

More commonly referred to as the Pink Water Lily, this is one of the most common species of water lilies.

As you might have guessed, the petals of this flower are shades of pink. Its inner petals tend to be a light, sweet pink, while its outer petals are a darker bright pink.

Inside these petals are bright yellow stamens, which create a beautiful contrast with the pink.

The flowers are fairly large and can reach up to seven inches tall.

They are also extremely fragrant, and delightful to smell. These pretty flowers sit atop rounded bright green lily pads that support them on the water surface.

Unfortunately, these beautiful flowers never last long and are usually only open for around four days at a time.

Rembrandt Water Lily

Artists and water lilies seem to go hand in hand! This lily was named after the artist, Rembrandt, supposedly because it mimics his painting style. If you are a fan of vivid pinks, you will love this water lily.

Its petals range in color from deep, dark pinks to bright shades of fuchsia, and they are eye-catching, to say the least.

These flowers love the sun, so only bloom during the daytime.

These are no simple little flowers, though, these babies can grow up to five feet in diameter! When they are full-sized, they really are hard to miss.

Despite their scale and bright color, these water lilies are still as elegant as any other.

Nymphaea Capensis

More simply named the Cape Blue Water Lily, this is the perfect flower for those who are not a huge fan of pink.

This flower has petals that range in color from deep purple to light indigo, and a yellow and purple center. Unlike many of the water lily species, this flower does not have rounded, delicate petals, but instead has thin and pointed ones.

They still look fragile and elegant, but not quite as tranquil as some others'.

One great thing about this water lily species is that it can survive over long periods of time without water; it is incredibly resilient in hotter climates.

Another benefit of this flower is that it blooms repeatedly throughout the year; you won't have to worry about only having a small timeframe to enjoy their beauty in, like the pink water lily.

These lilies are even larger than the Rembrandt lilies, and can reach up to eight feet in diameter! They sit upon dark green lily pads that have jagged edges.

Midnight Water Lily

Despite what its name suggests, this water lily actually blooms throughout the day. It is similar in appearance to the *Nymphaea Capensis*.

It has long, spiky, purple petals that range in tone from deep purple to light violet, and each flower has a yellow center.

They grow above bright green lily pads that are rounded but with slightly jagged edges, and each flower can reach up to 5 feet wide.

These flowers need full sun to thrive, and when they do thrive, they give off a beautiful subtle fragrance.

Alba Water Lily

This beautiful water lily has pure white petals that grow in around three layers, all of which are fairly long with rounded points.

In the center of these white, delicate petals is a mass of bright yellow stamens, which complement the light petals perfectly. It sort of looks like a fried egg in flower form, but much more beautiful!

This flower grows atop dark green, round lily pads – the kind of lily pads you picture when you think of typical lily pads!

This delicate little flower can reach up to 12 inches in diameter, and thrives most in warm climates – it loves the sun. It really is a sunny-side-up kind of flower!

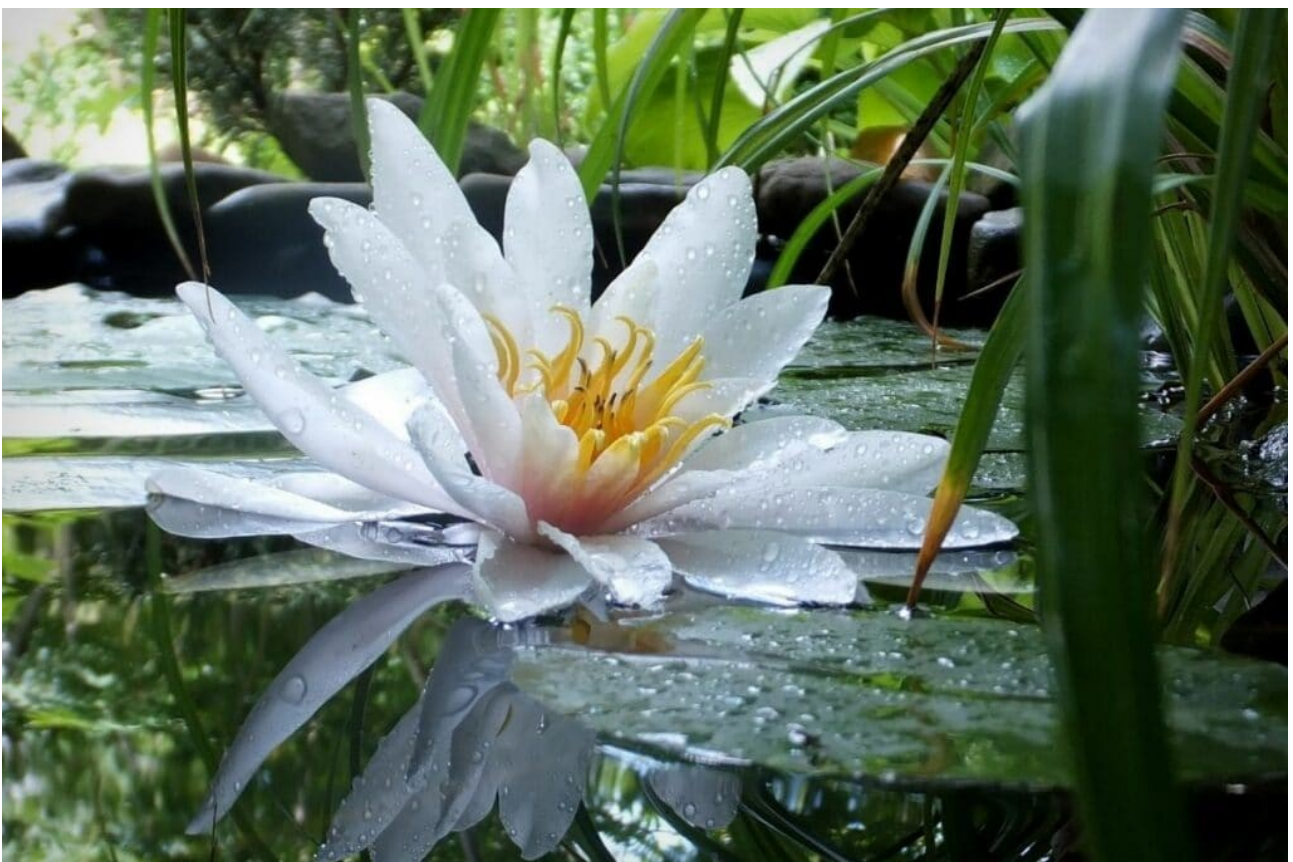
Mrs. George H. Pring Water Lily

If white lilies are what you are after, you will love these subspecies.

Like the previous water lily, this one loves the sunlight and fares best in hot climates. Its petals are rounded and long and have tones of white, cream, and even light yellow in places.

These light flowers are much larger than the Alba water lily, and can grow up to 6 feet wide! Their best feature, in our opinion, is the strong fragrance that they emit when in bloom.

Marliacea Carnea Water Lily



Next up is a lily that grows wide – up to five feet wide – and which matches its size with its beauty.

This is one of our favorite water lily subspecies – we just don't think there are many flowers that are able to match its beauty.

The petals on this species are delicate, elegant, and softly rounded at the edges.

They grow in three layers and give the flower a cup-like shape. The color of this flower is what makes it so elegant; each petal is a soft, whitish shade of light pink, which deepens slightly as it reaches the base of the flower.

The subtlety in color is just beautiful and is timeless.

Contrasting with the light pink shades is the bright yellow placed at the center of the flower. Its bright stamens complement the subtle petals and emphasize their beauty.

With their beauty comes to some vulnerability; these flowers are not quite as resilient as some other water lily subspecies, and they do not fare well in hard climates.

Afterglow Water Lily

The name of this water lily stems from the fact that it really does look like it glows! This lily is one of the most beautiful subspecies of the Nymphaeaceae family.

Soft, rounded petals grow outwards and upwards to reveal shades of pink, purple, yellow, and orange.

The petals have their deepest pink color at their tips, and the color gradually transforms into yellow as it reaches the center – this is what gives the flowers their supposed glow.

These flowers are as bold as they are beautiful, and they can grow to a whopping eight feet in diameter, and they release a strong fragrance when they are in bloom.

We love these flowers, and just wish we had our own pond big enough to house them!

Colorado Water Lily

This next water lily is gaudy – in a lovely way. Its petals are flamingo pink in color and are accentuated by a bright orange center of stamens.

The petals are thick and pointed, and their lily pads are so colorful that they can sometimes appear red instead of green. Colorado water lilies can reach a width of five feet. Despite their bold and tropical colors, though, these flowers fare surprisingly badly in hot climates and prefer mild conditions.

Carolina Sunset Water Lily

If you like sunny-yellow flowers, the Carolina Sunset lily might just become your favorite!

It has light yellow, peach-colored petals that open during the day when they get their hit of sunlight.

When open, these petals reveal an even brighter center; its stamens are a vibrant shade of deep yellow.

These flowers are bold, but small, and have a maximum diameter of around eight inches.

As well as looking beautiful, these flowers also smell wonderful, thanks to the strong fragrance they produce when in bloom.

These sunshine flowers grow above light green lily pads.

Chromatella Water Lily

Another yellow-tastic water lily is the Chromatella water lily. It has pale yellow petals that grow to long rounded points, and which grow in a few different layers.

Like the Carolina Sunset water lily, these lilies get more and more yellow the closer you get to their center.

These lilies grow among lily pads that are wrinkled and dark green, which really accentuate their light yellow tones. This lily is one of the smallest subspecies, as it is a dwarf variety of water lilies. This means that it is very delicate.

As opposed to many lilies that thrive in full sunlight, this water lily does best when everything is in moderation; it likes partial shade and partial sun. We think they should call this plant the Goldilocks water lily!

Emily Grant Hutchings Water Lily

Why do so many people get to have a water lily named after them? We want a pretty flower to be named after us, too!

Anyway, Emily Grant Hutchings, whoever she is, is very lucky, because this flower is absolutely stunning.

The petals on this water lily are vibrant and bright, and are usually dark pink in color, but can also be a bit purple.

Interestingly, though, this water lily is a night bloomer, which means that its gorgeous petals only open up and display their beauty at night.

However, this flower species is pretty easy to propagate and is not too fussy about the sun or shade. We would love to see this flower in action, but we might need to buy some night vision goggles first...

Antares Water Lily

This is another night blooming water lily that only spreads its wings outside of daylight hours.

Its petals are often a very pretty pale pink, but they are also commonly seen with darker tones of fuchsia and purple-reds. These flowers sit on top of rounded, crinkled, bright green lily pads.

One of the coolest things about these water lilies is that they are not just pink and pretty, but they are also incredibly useful. Antares water lilies are actually able to purify the water they are in, much more so than most other types of lily.

Nymphaea Hermine

The Hermine water lily is comprised of light, white petals, which grow in layers around a bright yellow center.

The petals almost make a star shape as they grow, and the stamens in the middle look a little like anemones.

These delicate light flowers can actually grow up to three feet each in diameter, and they thrive the most when in full sunlight.

Helvola Water Lily



The Helvola water lily is absolutely gorgeous. It is subtle, sweet, and dainty. Petals on a Helvola water lily can either be white in color or can exist in a range of shades of yellow.

However, vibrant its petals are, every Helvola lily flower will have a bright yellow center of stamens.

The shape of this flower's petals is slightly different from most other kinds of water lilies; they have the same slender shape and rounded point, but they tend to sometimes fold inwards at the edges.

These water lilies bloom during the day, they love sunlight, and they can grow up to three feet wide. Interestingly enough, its leaves can sometimes be purple!

George L. Thomas Water Lily

The George L. Thomas water lily is one of the most vibrant water lilies you can get. Its petals are plentiful and are covered in a bright pink color that reminds us of deep pink roses.

In the center of this pink mass are orange stamens, whose color really makes the pink of the petals pop.

This bright flower loves bright light, and blooms during the day. As well as being one of the most colorful water lilies, the George L. Thomas water lily is also one of the largest; it can reach a diameter of up to twelve feet! These are more for lakes than little garden ponds!

Luciana Water Lily

This is the type of flower we picture when we think of water lilies. It has light pink, rounded petals which grow in tight rows, and which deepen in color as you get towards its center.

In the middle of these dainty petals is a cluster of bright yellow stamens.

These flowers grow among waxy, round, dark green lily pads. Luciana water lilies bloom during the day, but they do not like being exposed fully to the sun, so do require some shade.

Pygmaea Helvola Water Lily

This is a dwarf subspecies of water lily, and can only grow up to two inches wide.

It may be small, but this cute little flower is still a treat to look at, especially when it blooms during the day.

Its petals range in color from white to light yellow, to deep yellow, to light orange. In the center of these petals is a hub of bright yellow stamens.

The bright colors of these water lilies make them very attractive to bees, as well as to the human eye! The lily pads that they grow between are usually quite a dark green; this deep color really highlights their yellow petals and makes them stand out even more.

Pygmaea Rubra Water Lily

Pygmaea Rubra water lilies are a lot like Pygmaea Helvola lilies, except they are pink instead of yellow or white.

It is also a dwarf variety of water lily, but what it lacks in size it makes up for with its vivid pink petals and bright orange stamens.

The petals are long and pointed, and their pink color is so vibrant that sometimes the petals turn red in color, after a period of time.

The mid-green lily pads that grow around the flowers contrast beautifully with the petal colors, both when they are pink and when they are red.

We think red lilies are absolutely stunning, and they are so rare that they are a joy to admire.

Nymphaea Capensis



These water lilies are lovely to look at. Their petals are a little thinner than most other water lilies', but the shape suits the flower.

The petals are usually white or very light pink, and they spread out to reveal bright yellow stamens.

As well as their two common colors, this flower can also occasionally be red or cream in color!

They love the sunlight, so Arc en Ciel water lilies bloom during daylight hours. They are medium-sized lilies and can reach a diameter of up to four feet wide.

Final Thoughts

Water Lilies have captured the hearts of people and cultures all over the world, and we are not surprised!

These ancient flowers have survived the toughest conditions that the world has to offer, and have done so with poise and beauty.

They can exist in climates all over the planet, and come in such a range of colors, sizes, and shapes.

They are as versatile as they are beautiful, and looking at them makes us want to elope to a chateau in France where we can grow our very own water lilies in our very own pond!