

To prepare lily stems without staining your hands, wear disposable gloves and remove the pollen bearing anthers before arranging the flowers. Work over a protected surface, and handle open blooms carefully so loose pollen does not spread.

Set up before handling the lilies

Lily pollen can leave a stubborn yellow or orange mark on skin, fabric and other surfaces. The pollen sits on the anthers, the small structures at the tips of the stamens inside each flower. Open flowers pose the greatest risk because their anthers may already be shedding pollen.

Cover the work surface with paper that can be discarded. Put on disposable gloves, and keep a small pair of scissors or tweezers nearby. Have a vase filled with clean water ready so you can place the stems straight into it after trimming.

Keep the flowers away from sleeves, tablecloths and other fabric while you work. Hold each stem below the flower head, rather than gripping the petals or reaching into the center with bare fingers.

Remove anthers and trim the stems

1. Inspect each open flower. Look for the anthers at the ends of the thin stamens around the center. Avoid touching them while you check.
2. Use tweezers or small scissors to remove each anther. Hold it gently over the paper, then place it directly on the paper rather than brushing it against the flower.

3. Check partly open flowers as well. If you cannot reach the anthers without forcing the petals apart, leave them alone and check again as the flower opens.
4. Remove leaves that would sit below the water line. This helps keep loose foliage out of the vase water.
5. Cut the bottom of each stem with clean, sharp scissors or floral shears. Place the stems in the prepared vase promptly.
6. Fold the paper inward to contain the anthers and any loose pollen. Discard it and the gloves, then wash your hands.

Check the arrangement as new buds open. You can remove their anthers at that point, ideally before the pollen begins to shed. Move the vase to a protected work surface first, and put on a fresh pair of gloves.

Questions about lily pollen

Can I remove anthers with my fingers?

Yes, but gloves are a sensible precaution. Tweezers give you more control and help keep pollen away from your skin.

Should I remove anthers from closed buds?

No. Wait until a bud opens enough to reach them without pulling the petals apart.

What if pollen gets on my hands?

Wash your hands with soap and water. Try not to touch clothing or other surfaces before washing.

Does removing the anthers stop every stain?

It reduces the risk from pollen, but loose pollen may remain on petals or nearby surfaces. Handle the flowers carefully and keep checking newly opened blooms.

More background: guide to flower paintings