

Nymphaea ‘Charlene Strawn’



Until the mid to latter part of the of the 20th century, hardy waterlilies choices remained much the same from year to year. The introduction of *Nymphaea* ‘Charlene Strawn’ in 1981 from the late Dr. Kirk Strawn, a leading hardy waterlilies hybridizer, was the start of new hardy hybrids with unique qualities entering the market.

This new hybrid, Strawn’s first, holds it flowers above the water, a characteristic of tropical waterlilies. The first-day flower stands tall, up to five-inches. The second day it begins to lower and by the third day the flower is sitting on the water. The very inner petals of *N.* ‘Charlene Strawn’ are a medium yellow with the dominant flower color being a pale lemon-yellow. Its delicate look is accented with deep-yellow stamens. The stellate-shaped flower opens wide. The young almost round pads have small purplish-brown specks that fade as the pads age. Like all waterlilies, *N.* ‘Charlene Strawn’ prefers full sun, six hours or more, but it will tolerate a little less. It is said to be fragrant. (I have not experienced this but probably have not been close enough to a first-day flower).

The rootstocks of most hardy waterlilies grow horizontally so best to plant in a container that has more width than depth. I grow *N.* ‘Charlene Strawn’ and most of my hardy varieties in round containers with a 10-inch diameter and a depth of 8-inches. Bigger is recommended but I have used this size container for 25-plus years. The lilies thrive and, almost as important, the pots are easy to handle and move around. I use a good top soil that contains some clay for my planting mix. Before planting, I crush a couple aquatic fertilizer tabs and mix with the soil before adding the waterlily. From early June ‘til Labor Day, I feed with the tablets every two weeks. Always follow package directions regarding number of tabs to how many gallons of soil.

Dr. Strawn named his first hybrid after his wife, Charlene, a fitting tribute as water gardening was her hobby before it became his passion. In all, Strawn introduced over 50 named varieties of hardy waterlilies and opened a wholesale water garden business, Strawn Water Gardens in College Station Texas. When he retired from the Wildlife and Fisheries Department at Texas A&M University in 1991, he transitioned full time into hybridizing hardies and overseeing his wholesale water garden business. *N.* 'Charlene Strawn' has become somewhat of a classic. She is worthy of space in your water garden.



***Nymphaea* 'Charlene Strawn,' one of the first hardy waterlily hybrids to hold its flowers above the water.**