

BEARDED IRIS CULTURE

WHEN TO PLANT: For best results, plant from July through September. Early planting establishes the new rhizomes before winter. If you live in an area with a strong winter climate, plant at least 4-6 weeks before a hard frost. July through September is also a good time to dig and reset clumps of iris that are crowded, usually after 3-4 years growth. If you live in an area with a harsh winter climate, your iris may require some sort of winter protection, especially the first year. Check with your local county agricultural agent to see what they recommend.

WHERE TO PLANT: The ideal location is a sunny, WELL-DRAINED position. Sunshine should be at least a half-day. Iris will grow in deep shade, but will not flower. Water should not stand in your beds; raise beds slightly above the level of the garden paths if necessary.

SOIL PREPARATION: This is the most important factor in growing iris. Work the soil well to a depth of 10 to 12 inches. If your soil is heavy, incorporate sand or some other material that will allow moisture to percolate out quickly. Addition of compost or other organic material will greatly benefit the soil and produce better plants. Gypsum is also an excellent soil conditioner. Have your soil tested before applying any other corrective measure. We recommend addition of alfalfa pellets to amend the soil.

DEPTH TO PLANT: Place your rhizomes at or just barely below the surface of the ground with the roots spread well out underneath so the rhizome is within reach of the sun's rays while the roots beneath are in a moist (not soggy) soil. **DO NOT PLANT TOO DEEPLY!** Be sure to firm the soil tightly around each rhizome when planting. At times of excessive heat, newly set plants can be shaded by an upright shingle or some such protection, cutting off the direct rays of the sun for a few days.

DISTANCE APART: This depends on your particular plans. Generally iris are planted 12 to 24 inches apart. Closer plantings will give an immediate effect, but will need thinning much sooner. To give an immediate clump effect, plant three rhizomes of one variety in a triangle with the toes of the rhizomes pointing inwards about 8 inches apart.

WATERING: Again, this depends on your location. Newly set plants need moisture so they can grow a new root system. Keep newly planted rhizomes moist, but not wet, until strong growth is apparent. They appreciate the attention. Water at fairly long intervals in dry weather. Established plants do not require watering except in very arid parts of the country. The common mistake is to give iris too much water!

FERTILIZING: Iris will thrive without feeding but will respond to fertilization with spectacular results. An application of a well-balanced fertilizer (5-10-5), applied as a top dressing dusted around and in between plants in the early Spring and very late Fall is desirable. Fertilizer can also be applied right after bloom is finished. Any fertilizer application should be light. In general, fertilizers high in nitrogen, including fresh manure, should be avoided because too much nitrogen encourages rot problems.

MOVING OR THINNING YOUR IRIS: Every 3 or 4 years, dig clumps, remove and discard the old center divisions that have bloomed and replant the new large fans with strong foliage. Use sharp knife to separate rhizomes, borer holes or diseased looking parts. Trim leaves halfway back to an inverted V shape (^) and also trim roots back to about 4-6 inches. Soak for 1-10 minutes in 10% bleach solution, dry in cool, shady place for a day. If leaf spot is a problem, soak in fungicide for 30 minutes after rinsing in bleach water.

GENERAL GARDEN CARE: Remove limp outside foliage as the iris grows, otherwise do not trim iris foliage if green. Brown or diseased leaves should be cut off and removed from the garden. At all times, try to keep all garden litter, grasses, etc. away from the rhizome. Bloom stalks (not leaves!) should be cut off close to the ground after blooming. It is especially important to keep the garden clean during winter and not allow dead leaves, etc. to remain around the plants.