



Ingredients in Doug's soil recipe.

© DOUGLAS H. CHYZ

Part Two: Container Soil

Well, did I capture your attention in part one? I hope so, because container gardening is a very rewarding type of gardening and can be used in many instances. Iris grow well in containers, especially if you provide nutritious soil. So, let's talk about soil.

As a side note, I do a lot of research for the AIS Iris Encyclopedia. As I look through all of the old *Bulletins*, I find enough articles on soils to fill a book. I am adding another one here.

Soil provides several benefits for container gardening; an important one that we normally do not think of is stability. You want a soil that will hold an iris stable, especially if it is a tall-growing iris. Good soil combined with the appropriate size container will provide an option for the roots to grow deep. My experience with container iris is that the roots will grow deep, seeking out moisture and nutrients, and they will fill a pot quickly in a couple of years.

Nutrients and microorganisms in soil provide for a healthy plant that will reward you with spectacular flower shows. Everyone I have been associated with in my twenty-five plus years of being hooked on iris has their own soil recipe. My soil recipe includes the following components: Sta-Green Flower and Vege-

table Garden Soil, composted manure, topsoil, peat moss, alfalfa meal or pellets, green sand, rock phosphate, 10-10-10 fertilizer, ironite, bone meal, lime, coffee grounds, and ground eggshells.

Set your oven for 350 degrees. Mix the soil ingredients in a wheelbarrow. Move the ingredients to a baking pan then into the oven for ten minutes. Oops, sorry, I wandered.

I mix like my mother did when she cooked—not necessarily exact measurements—and she was a great cook. So don't worry about being exact when you mix up a batch, just get close. I mix in a wheelbarrow or gardening cart. The bag of garden soil, two cubic feet, makes up about half of a batch, composted manure, topsoil, and peat moss the other half of the base mixture. Sometimes I do add a little sand. Then I start adding the other ingredients using about a two-cup scoop. Four to five scoops of alfalfa meal, two to three scoops of green sand (a mineral additive), one half scoop of rock phosphate, one scoop of 10-10-10, one half scoop of ironite, one to two scoops of bone meal, one scoop of lime, and one each of coffee grounds and eggshells if you have them. Now I mix this all together very well adding water as I go to make a moist mix but not soggy. Mixing takes a bit of time as everything needs to be distributed well and moist, because there is enough soil here to fill a number of containers. You want every container to get its fair share of all of the components if you are using three gallon nursery pots, which I use a lot.

If you use alfalfa pellets you will need to remix the batch the next day, as the pellets will swell up from the moisture you added (they will look like goose poop) and will need to be better-spread in the mixture.

I guarantee you will develop your own version of this mix or come up with your own and that is great, but I hope this will get you started growing fabulous iris in containers.

If you are a glutton for punishment, come back again; I will talk about feeding your container-grown irises.

