

THE HOW TO's Of Iris....

WHEN TO PLANT: The best time to plant iris: is late summer through early fall. From mid-July until mid-October depends on your location. Those in southern climates can usually push the deadlines and plant into November. Spring planting is discouraged but can be done under abnormal circumstances. Spring planting can often result in lack of bloom for a season or two and slow establishment.

WHERE TO PLANT: For best growth and bloom, iris need at least half a day of full sun. We've had success with plants receiving morning sun until 2:00 pm, then afternoon high shade. Older, historic cultivars have been observed to tolerate more shade than some of the newer cultivars.

SOIL CONDITIONS: Bearded iris need a balanced, well-drained soil. They are very adaptable to a variety of soil types. Raised beds can help with drainage and are a MUST for areas with high rainfall. Iris, like most perennials, prefer neutral to slightly acidic soil (pH of 6.8 - 7.0 is ideal). Heavy clays need to be amended with gypsum or coarse sand to aid drainage. Iris can be mulched lightly (for winter protection and weed control) as long as the mulch does not cover the rhizome. Once winter is over, it is wise to remove the mulch.

HOW TO PLANT: The most common mistake made with bearded iris is planting too deep. First make a 3" deep depression about 6" in diameter. In the center make a small, fist-sized mound of soil. The rhizome is placed on top of the mound so that 1/3 of the rhizome will be above the soil. Spread the roots out to support the plant, replace the soil, firmly pack around the roots to remove air pockets and water liberally. It is suggested 14-18" as a good distance between rhizomes. This allows the new growth to fill the area between plants in about three to four years. For mass or clump style plantings, plant rhizomes in a triangular fashion about 6" apart

FERTILIZATION: Modern iris varieties may need more fertilizer than older varieties due to the increased number and size of blossoms. Fertilize in mid to late April with bone meal, superphosphate, or a fertilizer low in nitrogen such as 6-10-10. Fertilizers high in nitrogen tend to cause bacterial rot and lush, but weak, foliage growth. Be sure that the 2nd and 3rd numbers are bigger than the 1st. These numbers stand for the amounts of phosphorus and potassium in the mixture. Phosphorus and potassium are the key nutrients in root and bloom production. Another dose of fertilizer at half strength after fall dividing and planting will slow release throughout the winter and early spring.

GENERAL CARE: Over time iris clumps will become crowded and bloom will suffer. In late summer simply lift the entire clump with a garden fork. Cut apart the new, younger "babies" from the older center rhizome, and replant as before. The center rhizome, although the largest, will not bloom a second time, so send it to the compost pile. Irises do not like competition from weeds. Keep your beds neat and clean to allow the sun and air to keep the rhizome dry and happy. **REMEMBER** - iris are VERY drought tolerant! Watering is only necessary under the most severe droughts - avoid the watering can otherwise. Finally, enjoy your iris. They will produce dramatic, beautiful blooms with minimal care and outstanding blooms with just a little more.