

SPURIA

Spuria are beardless iris that originated from the Mediterranean area of Europe. They are also seen in lesser numbers in England, Denmark, Russia, Afghanistan and Western China, with swordlike foliage that was once used to make rope in Europe; spuria iris can be 40 inches or taller, some reaching a height of 5 feet or more. Spuria perform better in areas of the country where the summer months are dry. The USDA lists zones 3-9 for growing. They are very popular with florists for corsages, bouquets and in large floral arrangements.

WHEN TO PLANT: Spuria are dug before they start showing signs of new growth. Rhizomes must be washed well and placed damp in a plastic bag for storage in the refrigerator, **NOT IN THE FREEZER**. Plant as soon as possible or store in the refrigerator until ready to plant.

WHERE TO PLANT: Spuria thrive in full sun best; but will do well on half a day's sun throughout the year. They will tolerate partial shade, especially in areas that have extremely high temperatures. (Arizona)

SOIL PREPARATION: Spuria prefer a neutral to slightly alkaline soil and they **MUST** have good drainage. Enrich the soil by adding alfalfa and aged manure. Heavier clay soil is much better than fine sandy soil.

BASIC PLANTING: Spuria can be difficult to establish. Basically spuria need water, manure and mulch to become established. Begin the planting by making sure the soil will allow good drainage and is enriched. Then make a hole about 2 inches below the surface. Add fertilizer (10-10-10 or 14-14-14) or aged manure or Osmocote (slow release plant food) to the hole. Then put lots of water into this hole. Finally add the rhizome, cover with soil and mulch and water again. Watering the spuria from the top of the soil would not be sufficient for establishing a clump. Mulch spuria the first year of growing. Saw dust is the best mulch to use. After the clump is established, the mulch may be removed during the blooming season.

DISTANCE APART: Spuria can be grown in the same spot for years; so space them at least 3 feet apart. They resent being transplanted.

WATERING: Water regularly if Mother Nature doesn't supply from early spring through the bloom season until about July 1st. However, **DO NOT** let them sit in pools of water. During the hot summer, spuria can be allowed to

go dormant by withholding water. If spuria do go dormant, and most do; be sure **NOT** to water as this will cause **ROT**. Too much moisture combined with summer heat and humidity will cause rot and damages the new growth or will even kill the entire clump.

FERTILIZING: Spuria are very heavy feeders. Incorporating aged barnyard manure and/or commercial fertilizer into the soil is advisable. Ordinary lawn fertilizer (10-10-10) works well to feed the spuria in the spring and again in the fall.

BLOOM: Spuria will not usually bloom the first year after planting. The second year should produce several bloom stalks. Peak bloom is in a 3 year old clump. Bloom time is 1-2 weeks after the tall bearded. Spuria seem to set seed easily and are somewhat easy to grow from seed. Bees are more attracted to spuria than other irises; thus pollination is more prominent. Cut bloom stalks to the base of the plant after bloom is complete. Keep an eye out for unwanted pollination.

DISEASE: The only serious disease in this area is crown rot. Watering dormant spuria in August is an easy way for spuria to become infected with fungus. Aphids seem to be attracted to spuria more so than any of the other irises, I think because of the fact their blooms produce a sticky-like nectar when they bloom; attracting the aphids and bees. The bloom stalk also has a deep “V” shape that holds the flower allowing the aphids to set up residency.

MOVING AND THINNING: Late summer and fall is generally thought to be the best time for transplanting; but they can be transplanted at any other time if you are careful **NOT** to let the rhizomes dry out. (**REMEMBER:** to store in the refrigerator and keep moist until you are ready to plant). Of all the irises spuria are by far the most vibrant and bold in color.