

## HOW TO GROW BEARDED IRIS

### BEARDED IRIS

Bearded irises are easy perennials to grow. Their three most important requirements are:

1. A sunny location with at least one half day of sunlight.

2. Ordinary garden soil with the addition of compost. In Sonoma County, excellent compost is available at the County landfill. A fairly neutral soil is preferred. A too acid condition may be corrected by addition of agricultural lime.

3. Good drainage is a must so that water does not puddle around the plants for any length of time. Raised beds are helpful in very heavy soils or poorly drained places.

### HOW TO PLANT

Prepare the soil by digging to a depth of 8 to 12 inches. In addition to compost, bone meal and other amendments may be added. Well aged manure or a general garden fertilizer such as 5-10-10 or 10-10-10 is also helpful. After digging and mixing, water and let the ground settle before planting.

Rhizomes received in July or August can be left out of the ground in a cool shaded spot for several weeks without serious damage to subsequent growth and bloom, but it is better to plant them as soon as possible. Watch for aphids while they are out of the ground!

Recommended planting is 18 to 24 inches apart. Rhizomes should be placed in firm contact with the soil with no air spaces under it. The roots should be spread out enough to go down and be completely buried. This will help to anchor the rhizome. In light dry soils the rhizome should be covered with an inch of soil. For heavier soils, it should be less, but always cover the rhizome for optimum growth. The plantings should then be watered to settle them into their new home.

### MAINTENANCE

1. **Watering:** Established plants can tolerate some drought in midsummer (a period of semi-dormancy). Otherwise, watering to keep the ground moist but not soggy is recommended. Depending on soil type, a weekly watering is sufficient. Avoid watering during the heat of the day.

2. **Fertilizing:** Three times a year is recommended; right after bloom in late May, in September and again in late winter about February. In February and May you can use a general garden fertilizer such as 5-10-10, or 10-10-10. Sprinkle the fertilizer around the plant (not on top of the rhizomes), cultivate into the soil and water. Fertilize established plants in September with 0-10-10 or other LOW nitrogen fertilizer. You do not want to give them a lot of nitrogen in the fall as too much encourages rot problems. Irises may do well the first year without fertilizing, but in most soils, health and bloom are promoted by addition of a general garden fertilizer. More nitrogen may be needed in soils which contain significant amounts of humus which is not well decomposed. Liquid fertilizer is effective for a quick fix but does not last.

3. **Cultivation:** Keep your iris beds free of weeds. They will take nourishment away from the rhizomes. A light, shallow cultivation is beneficial to allow air into the soil.

4. **Clean-up:** Old bloom stalks should be cut from the rhizome at ground level. Cut back leaves only to remove brown or damaged ones, Pull off leaves from the base only when they come off easily, otherwise, cut them.

5. **Dividing:** For most varieties, dividing every 2 to 4 years (in July or August) will prevent overcrowding. The rhizomes should be dug and cut apart, keeping only the new increases. Cut the green fans back to about 6 inches and trim the roots, leaving enough for good anchorage when transplanting. If desired, a clump may be renewed without digging up the whole thing, by cutting all of the old rhizomes out and enough of the new growth to eliminate crowding.

6. **Leaf Spot:** A fungus condition aggravated by overhead watering and rain. It appears as brown spots on the leaves, and spreads to the entire leaf, then the whole plant and others nearby. At the very first sign of leaf spot, spray the entire garden with

Updated 8/30/16 BAF