

## *Bearded Iris*



Bearded Irises are relatively easy to grow and will give good results with a minimum of care, but like all plants, the better the culture the more magnificent the display. The following instructions are easy to implement and should lead to beautiful iris blooms year after year.

### **When to plant:**

For best results, plant iris rhizomes in July, August, or September. This is also the best time (plants are normally dormant during the heat of July and August) to divide and replant iris that have become overcrowded, usually after three to five years. It is important that the roots of the newly planted irises be well established before the end of the growing season. Plant your iris at least four to six weeks before your first hard freeze or killing frost.

### **Where to plant:**

Irises require at least a half-day (6-8 hours) of direct sunlight. Some afternoon shade is beneficial in extremely hot climates, but in general, irises do best in full sun. Iris will grow in deep shade, but probably not flower. Provide your irises with good drainage. A raised bed or planting on a slope are ideal places to plant iris. Good air circulation is essential and water should not stand in the beds.

### **Soil Preparation:**

Bearded irises will thrive in most well-drained soils. If you have heavy soil, adding humus – compost – or other organic material – will improve drainage. Compost, expanded shale, gypsum, and/or decomposed granite are excellent additions to improve drainage. The ideal pH for irises is 6.8 (slightly acidic) but irises are quite tolerant of less-than-perfect soils. For our high alkaline soil, we recommend adding coconut coir fiber or soil sulfur to lower the pH.

### **Planting depth:**

Plant your rhizomes at or just barely below the surface of the ground. Irises should be planted so the tops of the rhizomes are visible and the roots are spread out facing downwards in the soil. However, in extremely hot climates or very light soils, cover rhizomes with up to one inch of soil. Tamp the soil firmly to anchor the rhizomes until new roots begin to grow, and water well. **It is a common mistake to plant Irises too deeply!**

**Fertilizing:**

Irises are virtually carefree once planted. They do however benefit from a twice-annual feeding of an acid-loving organic fertilizer. Simply top dress the area immediately surrounding the rhizomes and scratch into the topmost layer of soil and water thoroughly. This should be applied in September and once again after the Iris have finished their bloom cycle in the spring.

**Maintenance:**

After blooming in the spring, removal of the spent flower stalks will keep them looking tidy. Occasional dry leaves, especially the outermost ones are to be expected during their summer dormant periods. This should not be a cause for alarm but the dry leaves should be removed to keep tidiness. After several years the collection may lose its vigor and bloom production decreases. When this occurs, wait until early fall when the rhizomes may be dug and split into several smaller pieces about 3-4” in length. Discard the large central “mother” root as it will no longer produce flower stalks. You should have many viable rhizomes ready to plant. Share the remainder with your neighbors!