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Growing the Iris

Irises are reliable perennials that give an abundance of beauty. The irises you purchase at Garden Gate Greenhouse, Inc. are already potted and rooted. Most of the irises we grow are bearded or German varieties.

Irises like a sunny location and well-drained soil. If you have clay soil, add very coarse sand and humus. Bone meal and a good garden fertilizer that is low in nitrogen are good for irises. Well-aged manure also may be used. Work your soil well, by spading or turning over the soil with a garden fork to a depth of 10-12 inches. Do this 2 to 3 weeks before you are ready to plant. A well-prepared bed will result in better growth and more bloom. Don't starve your irises or make them compete with nearby grass or weeds for food and water. Once your irises are established, you may only have to add fertilizer once a year in the early spring.

Plant your iris so that the rhizome (the thick fleshy root) is level with or barely beneath the surface of the soil. If you have several plants, plant them at least 18" apart, facing the same way. The rhizomes will then increase in the same direction, without crowding each other too soon. Water thoroughly. Once established irises need very little water, except during prolonged dry spells.

From the new parts of the rhizome, new bloom stalks will emerge and the flowers will be exactly as the original flower. This is called vegetative propagation. In about 2 or 3 years, the new rhizomes will begin to crowd each other and you will want to divide the plant, cutting the newer parts of the rhizome from the old, which you may discard. This digging and separating is best done about one to two months after the bloom season, usually in July or August. Remember, as you plant the new rhizomes, that the roots must be buried firmly to hold the plant in place, but the rhizome should be near the surface. Soon after, the irises will grow additional roots to anchor the plant during the winter. In some areas, freezing and thawing can result in heaving the rhizome out of the ground. If this is a problem, you may want to add a layer of clean straw for additional protection.

Poor flowering is normally due to planting in excessive shade, using too much fertilizer, planting the rhizomes too deep, or allowing plants to become too crowded. To prevent disease and insects, remove all leaf and other debris in the fall.

For more information, visit: <http://www.irises.org/growing.htm>