

Iris Care

Bearded Iris are easy to grow, but there are a few tricks involved in planting them:

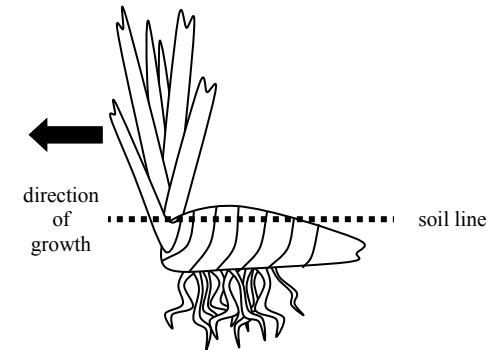
Pick a spot that gets at least 6 hours of direct sun each day, especially in the winter and spring. Less sun than that will prevent blooming in all but a few white varieties. All day sun can make the plants look really hammered in the summer, but produces the best flower show in the spring.

Start with fast-draining, fertile soil. Dig out the area 18 inches deep, and mix up 1 part sand, 2 parts compost,

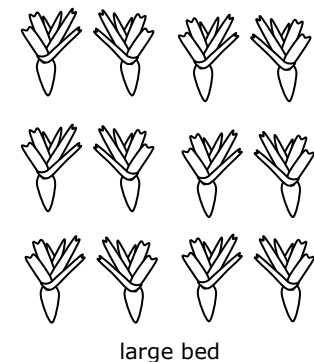
and 3 parts of the soil you just dug out. Add one to two cups of Berridge Rose Food for every square yard of bed. Put 1/2 inch of the mixture in the bottom of the bed and scratch into the bottom to make a transition layer—any sudden change in soil texture can slow or stop drainage. Refill the bed with the mixture, and apply at least 6 inches of water to settle it all down. Get ready to plant two to three days later—If the soil is too wet, digging in it will just pack it down into a brick, preventing root growth.

Plant the rhizomes horizontally (as shown above, right) with the fan of leaves pointing up, and the roots down. Leave the top of the rhizome barely exposed—burying Iris too deep delays bloom at best, and rots the

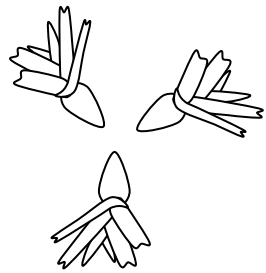
rhizome at worst!



In a large bed, point the ends with the fans all in the same way (see below). That is the direction the rhizomes will grow, and any "head-on collisions" will cause problems with fewer flowers and indivisible tangles in future years.



Spacing in large beds is about 18-24 inches apart.



small clump

Smaller clumps can have all of the fans pointing away from each other (see above) as long as the nearest other clump is at least 4 feet away. Rhizomes in small clumps can be planted as little as 9 inches apart. In both cases, closer spacing than recommended causes reduced bloom.

Water deeply right after planting, and every 10-14 days until about late October. When fast growth starts, up the watering to once a week until bloom, then gradually water less often to encourage dormancy.

Feed lightly with a high nitrogen food, once a month, October through bloom. A last feeding of Kelp Meal after bloom will help the rhizomes to fatten up and resist root rot.

After 3-4 years of growth and bloom, Iris rhizomes become crowded and bloom less. In late August you should dig them up and divide crowded clumps.

Gently wash the soil off the roots and inspect the rhizomes. Save the largest and healthiest rhizomes with

vigorous fans of leaves. Throw away the old, woody or soft, leafless "back bulbs", those with rotten spots (usually a fungus or bacterium), or those with foliage with fine yellow or white streaks (often a sign of virus disease). Cut the leaf fans back to 4-6 inches. Dusting the rhizomes with wettable sulfur dust will help prevent future disease problems. Let the divided rhizomes dry in the shade for 3-4 days.

Condition the soil as for a new planting, and plant the same way. With regular division, healthy Iris can live 20 years or more.