



Project List:

Bearded Irises

Bearded Irises are true powerhouse perennials, and every garden should include them. Along with their stunning flowers in a rainbow of colors, many also offer fragrance and repeat blooms. They're evergreen, drought-tolerant, and thrive for years with very little care. Planting is easy and an excellent long-term landscape investment. Here are your supplies and tips for the best results.

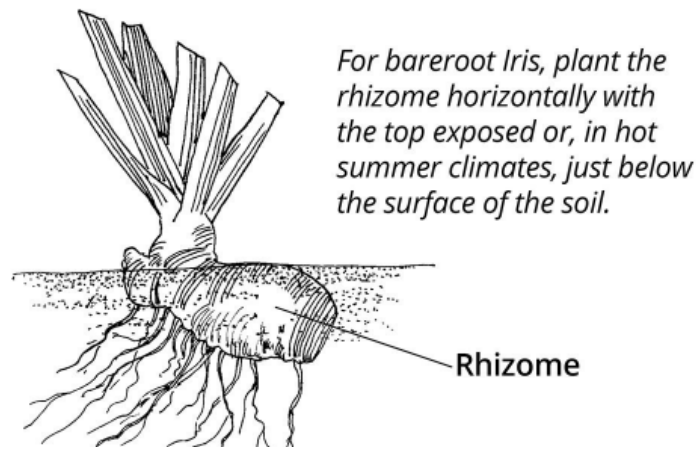
- ❑ **Root Stimulator**— A healthy root system is the key to your new plant's success! A brief, 1-2 hour soak in a weak solution of root stimulator will help rehydrate rhizomes just before planting. Water well with solution after planting.
- ❑ **Compost**— Organic compost (such as **Vital Earth Organic Compost**) loosens heavy clay soils and helps make nutrients available. Amend existing soil prior to planting rhizomes.
- ❑ **Expanded Shale**— A porous, lightweight gravel that increases drainage and aeration and helps to break up native clay soils, which is especially important for bearded irises.
- ❑ **Mulch**— Retains moisture and helps regulate soil temperature. *Mulch only lightly around bearded irises;* be cautious to not crowd the stems or leaves with mulch as this can cause rot.

SITE: Bearded irises *bloom best in full sun* (minimum of 6 direct hours), although they will grow in part sun as well, but with fewer blooms. Tall bearded irises can reach 36" or more in bloom, so they're ideal for planting in the middle of perennial borders and beds as a backdrop for shorter blooming perennials and annuals.

PREP: Dig the soil to a depth of 10" and add compost and **expanded shale** to break up heavy clay, improve drainage and add organic matter. It is *not* necessary to add fertilizer at this time. You may choose to give the rhizomes a brief soak (1-2 hours) in water or a weak solution of water and **root stimulator** to hydrate them before planting. This is not necessary, but some iris enthusiasts advocate it. Allow the rhizomes to dry in full shade. Once they are dry, you may also wish to give them a light dusting of **sulfur** as an additional guard against rot.

PLANT: Space rhizomes 8"-12" apart. Ideally, plant one variety in groups of 3 in a triangle pattern (with growing tips facing outward) for greater color impact. Plant rhizomes *very shallowly*—about 1" deep, where the top of the rhizome is just covered with soil and any foliage is above soil level. Gently spread out any roots while planting, and water in lightly.

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Most common question: Why did my bearded irises stop blooming?

Typically it could be up to 3 things: They've become more and more shaded; they need to be fertilized; or- the number one reason- they've simply become too crowded.

FERTILIZE & MAINTAIN: Use a low-nitrogen / higher phosphorus food such as **Espoma's Bulb-tone** in early spring (around mid-February) before bloom, and again in mid-September. Reblooming varieties need more consistent watering and fertilizer: add a May and mid-October feeding for them. *Do not overfeed bearded irises.*

You may lightly mulch your irises in fall and late spring to help regulate soil temperatures. After bloom in spring or fall, remove spent blooms and stalks.

PROPAGATION: Plan to divide clumps of rhizomes every 3-4 years, depending on density, to encourage continuing bloom. This is a great time to share your 'passalong' plants. Division is best done in summer when rhizomes are dormant, usually July or August, when the chance of disease is less of a risk.

A glossary of some common bearded iris terms:

- **Rhizome:** A fleshy, underground stem from which leaves and roots grow
- **Standards:** The upright three petals of a bearded iris bloom
- **Falls:** The lower three petals of a bearded iris bloom
- **Beard:** Fuzzy attachment at the base of each fall petal
- **Rebloom:** An iris that blooms in any other season other than the normal spring bloom
- **Fan:** The shape created by iris foliage when trimmed back, noted during division
- **Dividing/Division:** The separation of multiple rhizomes from a clump of rhizomes that have been growing together for several years; usually in late summer to encourage repeat bloom

See a Garden Advisor for additional help to be the most successful with bearded irises.