

Siberian Irises: Planting and Culture

When to plant Plant the rhizomes soon after you receive them. Best is to soak them (and their roots) overnight before planting to re-hydrate fully. Change the water daily if the plants must be held longer before planting. Do not let the roots dry out.

Where to plant A moderately-drained or slightly moist, sunny location is best. Siberian irises will grow in less than full sun, but most need nearly a full day of sun to bloom well.

Soil preparation Many local soils can be fine for irises as they are, if there is moderate aeration and drainage. High organic content is good, and lightly acid soil is best, so add ferrous sulphate (Copperas) if the soil is neutral. If a soil test shows nutrients to be lacking, add them as indicated. A light feeding with a balanced granular fertilizer may be helpful if the area has grown irises for a few years.

How to plant Dig a hole about ten inches deep and build a mound inside the hole. Place the rhizome on top of the mound so that its top will end up two to three inches below the soil surface and its roots are spread out over the mound. Fill in the soil and firm it down. Water well immediately after planting. If hot when planting, extra shade and water help to establish the plants. Siberians do fine with a light, non-packing mulch such as pine needles or pine bark. Thereafter, water when the soil feels dry a few inches below the surface.

Feeding Siberians thrive with slightly more food than bearded. Small amounts of balanced granular fertilizer (e.g., 10-10-10) spaced through spring and early summer work well, as does a single application of a balanced slow-release product.

Cut them back? Only cut back Siberians after they turn brown in the fall. However, if old leaves naturally wither and brown, remove them. Then, usually late November, cut all leaves off an inch or two above ground level.

Should I spray? Iris borers can be a problem in much of the country, including here, moreso on bearded irises than Siberians, but borers do affect Siberians. Spraying with Cygon-2E is effective if done with a nozzle sprayer beginning in mid spring (after new growth begins) and repeated after two weeks and again after two weeks; be careful to follow directions.

Bloom season Blooming stalks can be enjoyed in the garden or cut for display indoors in a vase or arrangements. Spent flowers should be snapped off. When the stalk has finished blooming, snap it off close to the ground by bending it backwards on a dry day.

Dividing Clumps should be divided every three to five years. Dig the entire clump in April or August.. Cut the leaves back to 6" or so. Remove the soil and separate the rhizomes. Discard old rhizomes, keeping ideally networks of three or more fans. Alternatively, old overgrown clumps can often be cut with a shovel into four or six pie-shaped sections. Wash them, and trim the roots to 4" or so. Keep them moist until replanted.

More info Learn more about these and other irises from your local iris society affiliated with the American Iris Society, <http://www.irises.org/>

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