

LOUISIANA IRIS CULTURE

Starting Rhizomes. Sterilized rhizomes can be placed in clean water until they can be planted. Before planting, take scissors and cut away dead mushy roots next to the rhizome or peel them away with your hands. Plant rhizome an inch below the surface of the soil. Water often but don't keep the soil wet until new growth begins.

Bed preparation. Louisiana iris will grow in almost any garden soil that can be kept moist. They do better in soil that has been well amended with organic matter. Sphagnum peat moss, cotton seed meal, cotton seed hulls, alfalfa pellets, and bagged manure are all good organic amendments. Use all the amendments you think you need and then some, preferably 3 to 5 inches of organic matter to each bed. The lighter the soil, the more quickly the plants become established. Sand can be added for drainage and its weight may help hold the plants down. Leaf mold and homemade compost are also good soil amendments. If the soil is very alkaline, soil sulfur or aluminum sulfate can be added.

Lined Beds and Containers. A great way to grow Louisiana iris is to line entire beds with heavy black plastic several sheets thick or rubber ornamental pond lining material. It is only necessary to dig down 12 to 14 inches. Allow a 3 x 3-foot area for each plant. So for a double row, dig a 6-foot-wide bed with the length being a multiple of 3. Throw all the soil to one side, line the bed, and place the soil and amendments back inside. An easier way is to dig down 7 or 8 inches and add a border of 2 x 6's to the top of the existing soil line. Line the bed and place the soil and amendments back in. This will minimize the work by not having to remove as much soil and will give you a 5-inch area for the organic material you will add. If the bed is to be level with the ground, some soil will have to be removed to allow for the organic matter. Entire beds can be built above ground and lined. Treated lumber, rocks and the new concrete wall blocks make for many choices.

Large containers such as 1/2 barrels can be sunk into the ground to plant Louisiana irises in. Holes can be drilled about 4 inches below the top of the container so the soil at the top can dry out. You can compensate for overly wet soil by planting the rhizomes high in the containers where they seem to do extremely well. The soil will stay wet and may sour but the rhizome is high enough in the growing medium to get plenty of oxygen. Even sunken kiddie pools can make great growing containers but look better if sunk in the ground where the colored plastic doesn't show.

Planting. Plant in the fall after the plants have become established in their pots and the weather has cooled. Place the plants on 3-foot centers and plant the rhizomes a little higher since the soil may stay extremely moist through the fall and winter. Light mulch will help conserve moisture and keep the weeds down. A weak solution of liquid plant (Miracle Gro) should be applied at planting. Do not fertilize heavily in the fall because rampant soft growth may be hurt by cold winter weather and the rich soil will provide sufficient nutrients. Mulch newly planted irises to give rhizomes protection from freezing. Additional layers can be added just before a freeze.