



Saffron Crocus

Crocus sativus

Iris Family (Iridaceae)

Zones: 5-9

Full Sun

Moderate Water

Location: Various locations throughout the Garden

Crocuses are usually referred to as bulbs, but are in fact corms (or bulbotubers). Corms are modified plant stems that serve as storage organs for the plant's survival through the winter. In contrast, bulbs are made up of fleshy scales that are actually modified leaves. Corms may be split in order to multiply the number plants.

Crocus sativus is a corm that is cultivated in order to harvest its highly prized stigmas, which are used for culinary and medicinal use. The spice made from these stigmas is called saffron. There are typically three stigmas per crocus flower, and each must be collected by hand, which is the reason why the retail price for saffron is so high.

These plants are fall-blooming and perennial. They emerge small and stemless; the flowers are lavender colored, the stamens are a deep yellow, and the stigmas (which are the desired harvest) are bright reddish-orange. In some commercial saffron, the yellow stamens have been added for weight, but they do not add any additional taste or value to the saffron.

Whether you are planting these wonderful corms for strictly culinary use or for their delightful-looking flowers, they should be planted in July or August so you can enjoy them in the fall!