

The Crocus

Scientific Name: Crocus

Irish Name: Cróch

The Crocus is a familiar and much-loved flower of early spring and is often the first to bloom in the garden after winter.



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flower_blossom.jpg by Weneerle bloom CC BY-SA 4.0

Crocuses peeking through the snow are often the first sign of spring!

The beautiful little flowers - yellow, white, purple, lilac, or mauve - provide a burst of colour, even on snow-covered ground. Not all crocus species flower in spring; many flower in autumn. There are about fifty species, mostly found in the Mediterranean region. The plant originated there and in the Middle Eastern and European mountains.

The Autumn Crocus (*Colchicum officinale*), which is not a true crocus but related to lilies, is particularly poisonous and it is best to wear gloves when planting. A rare Irish native, it has medicinal properties that relieve gout.



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crocus_mediterraneus File:Crocus_mediterraneus.jpg by Weneerle bloom CC BY-SA 4.0

The crocus is an easy flower to grow and produces beautiful blooms.

Growing Crocuses

Crocuses are perennial and grow from a swollen stem-base or 'corm', which has fleshy roots at the base.

The corm is actually a swollen underground plant stem and it is a means of protecting the plant during the harshness of winter. When conditions are right, the stem is ready to emerge above ground and produce its flowers.

Crocuses are easy to grow. They need well-drained soil, usually lime-rich, and will grow in full sun or in shade. For the spring flowering variety it is best to plant them in the autumn so they have time to produce new roots before winter sets in.



To plant, dig a hole that is approximately three times the depth of the corm. For example, if a corm is 2cm high, then plant it in a 6 cm deep hole. Space the corm about 3 cm apart. As the flowers are only about 6 cm high when fully grown, it is best to plant a number of corm in one area to make an impact.

The Most Expensive Spice

One species of crocus is grown as a spice. This is a particular crocus, Saffron Crocus (*Crocus sativa*), not just any crocus you find in the garden.



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saffron#/media/File:Crocus_sativus_01_by_Line_1.jpg CC BY-SA 3.0

Saffron is the tiny red stigma (the female part of the plant) at the centre of the flower. These stigmas are harvested by hand and dry-roasted to produce saffron. Small amounts of this expensive seasoning adds flavour and colour to dishes. It takes approximately 450-500 stigmas to make 1 gram of saffron. Because it is so labour-intensive to produce small amounts of the spice, it is a very expensive spice to buy.

The stigma (red parts above) are hand picked and dry-roasted to produce saffron (below).



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crocus#/media/File:Crocus_sibericus_corm.jpg by Weneerle bloom CC BY-SA 3.0



Crocus corms, which have a net-like papery outer covering.

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