



Crocus

Crocus sp.
(crow-cus)



What about it?

Crocuses are members of the iris family. The resemblance can be found in the narrow, grass-like leaves of these plants. The leaves of the crocus are about 5 inches long. They grow directly out of the corm, or bulb. The flowers are funnel-shaped. They are one of the first signs of spring, blooming in late March or early April. There are several varieties in shades of gold, white, or purple. There are also fall-flowering varieties.

What is it used for?

They make a great border plant, as well as an addition to a rock garden. Most folks like to plant them in front of shrubbery; this gives the much-anticipated flowers a great green background. Crocuses make fantastic group plantings, where they freely naturalize and spread. They do not do well indoors or in window boxes because they need direct and constant sunlight.

Where does it grow? How do we grow it?

A spot with southern exposure is the best spot to plant crocuses. The warmth and sunlight will encourage them to open early. They prefer a well-drained soil. They are very hardy and do not need protection from the elements.

What are its primary problems?

Crocuses are rarely affected by any pests or diseases. You might find your flowers speckled with dark spots which indicates a virus disease known as 'breaking'. Tulips get this too. The best thing to do is to remove and destroy the affected plant so that the others are not infected as well.

How do we propagate it?

Crocuses come from corms, or bulbs. Spring-blooming plants should be planted in September. Autumn-flowering crocuses can be set in the soil in late July. Bury the corms 2 or 3 inches deep.

Helping You Put Knowledge to Work

Saffron

Crocus sativus

Fam: *Iridaceae*

Coming from the dried stigmas of the **saffron crocus**, (NOT THE COMMON CROCUS WE HAVE GROWING IN OUR YARDS) it takes 75,000 blossoms or 225,000 hand-picked stigmas to make a single pound which explains why it is the world's most expensive spice.

More saffron trivia

According to Greek myth, handsome mortal Crocos fell in love with the beautiful nymph Smilax. But his favours were rebuffed by Smilax, and he was turned into a beautiful purple crocus flower. A native of the Mediterranean, saffron is now imported primarily from Spain, where Moslems had introduced it in the 8th century along with rice and sugar. Valencia coup (coupé meaning "to cut" off the yellow parts from the stigmas) saffron is generally considered the best, though Kashmir now rivals this reputation. Saffron is also cultivated in India, Turkey, China and Iran. The name is from the Arabic word zafaran which means 'yellow'. The French culinary term safrané means 'coloured using saffron'. Its colouring properties have been as prized as its unique flavour. In India its colour is considered the epitome of beauty and is the official colour of Buddhist robes. Saffron was used to scent the baths and public halls of Imperial Rome. Pliny wrote that saffron was the most frequently falsified commodity, which has been true throughout history. Low grade saffron has even been treated with urine to give it colour, though it has most often been falsified with dried calendula or marigold. The Romans initially brought saffron to England, though it was lost to them in the Dark Ages. It is claimed that in the 14th century a pilgrim to the Holy Land, smuggled back one crocus bulb in a hollow staff from which all English saffron supposedly descends. It is grown in great quantities in Essex, especially in a town called Saffron Essex, whose coat of arms includes three saffron crocuses. Francis Bacon wrote "it maketh the English sprightly".

Information for this fact sheet was obtained from the NY State Horticulture Study Guide for youth at
www.hort.cornell.edu/4hplants/flowers
www.theepicentre.com/Spices/saffron.html

This publication contains pesticide recommendations. Changes in pesticide regulations occur constantly, some materials mentioned may no longer be available, and some uses may no longer be legal. All pesticides distributed, sold, and/or applied in New York State must be registered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Questions concerning the legality and/or registration status for pesticide use in New York State should be directed to the appropriate Cornell Cooperative Extension Specialist or your regional DEC office.

READ THE LABEL BEFORE APPLYING ANY PESTICIDE.

Updated 2007