

Saffron

Crocus sativus · Iris family

DIFFICULTY Moderate
TYPE Perennial corm, autumn-flowering
MATURITY 6–10 weeks to flowers



SUN
Full sun



WATER
Light in autumn
and winter; dry
in summer



SOIL PH
6.0–8.0



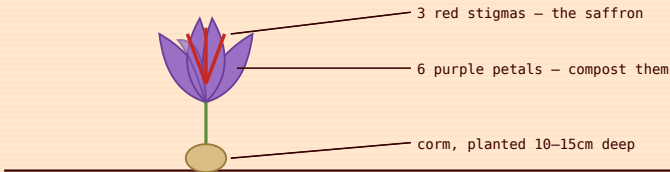
SPACING
10cm apart



DEPTH
10–15cm

01 Flower and stigmas

Each autumn flower has three red stigmas, and those threads are the saffron. About 150 flowers make one gram of dried spice, so a small patch gives only a small harvest.



02 Planting

METHOD	Plant corms pointy end up, 10–15cm deep and 10cm apart, in very well-drained soil. Corms flower in the first autumn.
SOIL	Very free-draining soil, ideally sandy or gravelly or a raised bed. It tolerates alkaline soil but not wet feet.
TIMING	Plant corms in late summer to early autumn (February to March); they flower in autumn, about 6–10 weeks later.
SOURCE	Buy <i>Crocus sativus</i> corms from a specialist grower, as other autumn crocuses are not saffron and some are poisonous.

Planting timing varies significantly by Australian climate zone. Set your zone above (or use the Find My Climate Zone tool) for guidance tailored to your own area.

04 Problems

- **Corm rot** — corms rot in wet, heavy soil, especially in summer; plant in raised beds or sandy soil.
- **Rodents and rabbits** — dig up and eat corms; plant in a wire cage or a raised bed with mesh below.
- **Poor flowering** — caused by shade, small corms, or planting too shallow; use plump corms in full sun.
- **Humid summers** — the corms need a hot, dry rest, and in humid regions they tend to rot rather than flower.

03 Growing care

- Water lightly after planting and through autumn and winter if it is dry, but keep summers dry.
- Weed carefully while leaves are growing, since corms are shallow-rooted.
- Leave the grass-like leaves to die down naturally, because they feed next year's flowers.
- Lift and divide corms every 3–4 years in summer when dormant, and replant in fresh ground.

05 Harvest & storage

SIGNS	Pick the flowers on the morning they open. They bloom for only a day or two, so check daily through autumn.
METHOD	Pick the flowers, then pull out the three red stigmas with tweezers straight away, discarding the yellow style.
CURING	Dry the stigmas on paper in a warm, dark, airy spot for a few days, or at the lowest setting of a dehydrator until brittle.
STORAGE	Whole threads, in an airtight jar in the dark, keep up to 2 years, though flavour fades over time.
PRESERVING	See Dehydrating (drying stigmas gently at low heat) for ways to keep a harvest surplus.

06 Companions & rotation

PLANT NEARBY

Lavender

Rosemary

Thyme

AVOID NEARBY

Wet, irrigated beds

ROTATION NOTE

Lift and divide corms every 3–4 years; replant in fresh ground.