



Saffron Production for Home Gardeners: Planting Depth and Density for Saffron Corms

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Saffron (*Crocus sativus*) is a fall-blooming crocus in the *Iridaceae* family. They are suitable for USDA plant hardiness zones 4-8. Several factors must be considered when planting saffron corms to maximize on flower and corm production. Selecting the best site to grow saffron is important. It grows best in soils with a light to moderate texture and high level of organic matter. The soil and planting site should be well drained. If corms are growing in places where there is standing water for an extended period, they will rot.

Corms should be planted as soon as possible in August or early September. They should not be held over until the next spring because they will sprout and then die. The corms should be planted at a depth of around 6 inches (Fig. 1). They can be planted directly into the garden bed, in a raised bed or grown in containers. We have grown them successfully in milk crates covered on the inside with weed cloth. You can also grow them in pots, but they need to be at least 11-12 inches square. If you grow them in your garden bed, beware, squirrels and voles may eat them. Deer also love to feed on the leaves over the winter and spring, so cover them with deer netting if necessary.

Corms should be planted at a density of 6-12 corms per sq. ft, usually around 3-4 inches apart. The potting soil at the top serves as mulch to prevent weed growth, supplies nutrition over the growing season, and insulates the corms from the cold in winter. After planting the corms, they should need no further watering if they are grown outside. Natural rainfall should be enough. Corms should begin to sprout in 30 days and the flowers will emerge soon after.

Flowers should be harvested in the morning after the dew or frost is gone. They should be picked just before they open (Fig. 3). The stigmas should be separated from the purple petals and yellow stamens. Dry them in the oven or dehydrator at ~200° F until they are fully dry. Store in a glass or metal jar with a tight-fitting lid and store in a dark dry place. Wait one month before using newly harvested saffron.

The leaves of the corms will continue to grow all winter. If growing them in containers, keep them on the ground, not on a bench. Insulate the sides so they don't get too cold. In the spring the parent corm will produce several secondary corms, which will become next year's crop. They will go dormant in June or July.

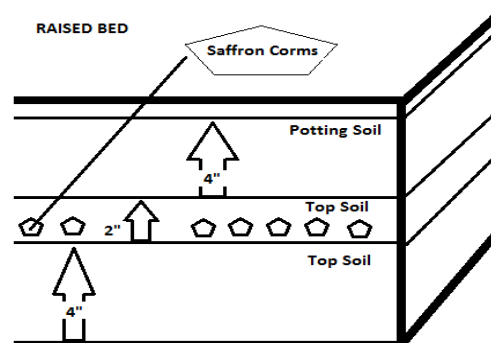


Fig. 1. Saffron corms planted in a raised bed.



Fig. 2. Milk crate for growing saffron (left) and filled with soil and sprouting corms (right).



Fig. 3. Saffron flowers ready to harvest.



Fig. 4. Flower parts: Red arrow: stigma. Yellow arrow: stamens.

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