

Did You Know?



Saffron – *Crocus sativus*

- The herb saffron refers to the harvested stigma of the *Crocus sativus* plant.
- This crocus is the source of the most expensive spice in the world.
- The corms are dormant in the spring and summer, with the production of flowers in early autumn.
- The stigma is the only edible part of this plant.
- Saffron is used for both flavor and as a colorant across many cultures.
- According to archeologists, the use of saffron dates back at least 50,000 years ago with the discovery of images in Iranian caves that contain traces of saffron pigments.
- Saffron remains an important economic crop in Iran today, as well as in India, Greece, Spain, Italy, Turkey, France, Switzerland, Israel, Pakistan Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, Japan, and Iraq.
- Medicinal uses vary across cultures, and include use to improve circulation, decrease blood pressure, stimulate digestion, as a sedative and relieve depression.
- Do not confuse *Crocus sativus* with the fall crocus, *Colchicum*, which is poisonous!

Growing and Harvesting

- Grow saffron in well-drained soil in a sunny location.
- Raised beds, containers and even milk crates are options for growing saffron.
- Protect saffron corms from mice and voles and the flowers from rabbits.
- Harvest early in the morning before the flowers open to preserve quality.
- Use tweezers to extract the red filaments from the flower, leaving the flower on the plant. Or, remove all of the flowers at once, then while seated at a table, and remove all the filaments. Discard the petals and yellow stamens.
- Saffron stigmas are dried prior to use in a well ventilated place. Quick drying can be achieved by placing on a tray in a 110-120° oven with the door open for 15 minutes or in a food dryer. Store in an airtight container away from light for one month before consumption.