

October 2021

Saffron - *Crocus sativus* L.

From the Iridaceae family (iris family).

Saffron is an autumn-flowering crocus. It originally comes from the Aegean islands. It is now cultivated in Iran, Spain and Morocco, for example, but also in the eastern parts of Austria.

The saffron plant grows from a tuber. At the end of September the first narrow, linear leaves appear, also called saffron grass. Between October and November the light purple, 6-petaled flowers with purple veining develop. Each flower produces 3 orange-yellow stamens up to 4.5cm long from the pistil. The individual flower blooms for only 2-3 days. The saffron grass remains green until late spring and then dies. The tuber survives in the soil until the next sprouting in autumn.

Saffron is a spice and medicinal plant. The ingredients are mainly carotenoids, essential oils and bitter substances. Saffron gives dishes their yellow colour and sweet-aromatic aroma. The parts of the plant that are used exclusively are the stigmas. All other parts of the plant are poisonous - especially the tubers.

The harvest is done laboriously by hand picking. This, the short flowering period and the low yield of 3 stigmas per flower explain the price of saffron. Up to 200,000 flowers are needed for 1 kilogram of saffron spice and it costs up to € 30,000.

There is a danger of confusion with the autumn-flowering, highly poisonous meadow saffron (*Colchicum autumnale* L.). The 3 stamens of saffron are clearly distinguishable, whereas the flower of the meadow saffron has 6 stamens. In addition, saffron has narrow, grass-like leaves in autumn, whereas meadow saffron has no leaf in autumn, but a 3-5cm wide leaf in spring until June.

You can grow saffron in your own garden. As it can only be propagated via tubers, it is to be planted in August in a sunny spot with loose, water-permeable soil. Saffron does not tolerate waterlogging. With a bit of luck, you will harvest the tender threads in early autumn.

