

Growing Pacific Coast Iris from Seed

Courtesy of the King County Iris Society
www.kcis.org

Growing PCI from seed is pretty easy, and you can take advantage of Mother Nature to do it.

If you want to hasten germination, suspend the seed in fine mesh bags (pantyhose!) in the water inside your toilet tank and leave it there for a week or two. You could also stratify them in wet paper towels inside Ziploc plastic bags. Research shows cold isn't needed.

Sow the seed in fast-draining slightly-acid soil, either in a pot or out in the garden. Cover with just enough soil that the birds can't see the seeds and make off with them. If using pots, leave them out in the weather over winter to let the rains do the watering for you. If your weather isn't rainy over winter, you get the watering job.

Germination probably occurs after about a month's constant dampness, but growth isn't very fast until the weather warms up a bit.

Bitter cold can kill the newly-germinated seeds, so take precautions if that is the forecast.

In a coastal climate, PCI would like full sun. In a harsher interior climate they prefer morning sun and afternoon shade, or light shade all day. In either case they prefer good drainage, as on a slope.

If you start the seed in pots, transplant to the garden when the seedlings are 2-3 inches tall, hopefully after danger of frost is over. Plant them 6-8" apart so you can take out anything ugly without harming the others when they're big enough to bloom, which should happen when the plant has 3-5 fans. If you happen to plant them out in the fall, be sure to mulch the seedlings 2-3" deep in fir needles or something for their first winter, then uncover them when spring comes. The adult plants can take 100+ heat and 10- cold.

Food (Miracle-Gro, or granular rhododendron-camellia-azalea food, or timed-release fertilizer) and water will NOT hurt PCI, but don't water them while they're in full hot sun—it's too much stress, and will leave them more susceptible to fungal infection.

Remember that open-pollinated seed has one known and one unknown parent, so there are no guarantees as to what the blooms will be like, regardless of the known parent. Even if it were species seed, it would show some influence from the other parent if it were grown in a garden with many different PCI around it.

Have fun, and good luck!