PLANT FACT SHEET

Crocus sativus L.

GENUS *Crocus* **FAMILY** Iridaceae

COMMON NAMES Saffron, Saffron Crocus

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Root, Corm, Herb, Spice, Pollen, Leaves, Flowers

CAUTION: It is important to dry the flowers well before using for flavouring. Saffron is poisonous. A safe dose should not exceed 1 g per day.
The stigmas or parts of the flower that catch pollen are used as a spice. They are used to colour and flavour sauces, creams, biscuits, preserves, liqueurs, curries, rice dishes, and other foods.
The roots are eaten roasted.
The leaves are used as a flavouring.

DESCRIPTION

A corm with grass-like leaves. It keeps growing from year to year. Under the ground it has bulb like corms. It grows 15-23 cm high. The leaves are long and grey-green like the leaves of chives. The flowers are small and mauve. The lily like flowers have stigmas which are bright orange. Each flower has 3 stigmas that are connected to the base of the flower by a fine pale thread. The flower stalks are leafless and the flower stalks occur singly. The dried stigmas are 10-18 mm long and dark red and thin. They are needle like at one end and trumpet shaped at the other.

HABITAT

A temperate plant. They require sun and good drainage. It needs a pH of 7. It is best in a good sandy loam. It is resistant to frost and drought. It suits hardiness zones 6-8. In Yunnan.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

It is grown from vegetative parts. Being a triploid plant it is sterile. Plant 3-15 cm deep and 10 cm apart. It won't flower in areas with wet cloudy summers.

Harvesting and Seed Production

The flowers are picked and the threadlike stamens removed. The flowers are then dried before using. Over 5,000 stigmas (1,700 flowers) are needed to give 25 g of dried saffron. (Or 200,000 flowers for a kg of saffron)

NOTES

There are about 80 Crocus species. It is a sterile triploid plant. It is mentioned in the Bible. Song of Songs 4:14. It has anticancer properties.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



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