

# IRIS CULTIVATION IN TRADITIONAL OLIVE GROVES

Medicinal plants as an innovative solution



## THE WHAT AND WHY

### The cultivation of medicinal plants in Europe

Italy imports most medicinal plants from Eastern European countries, the Far East and Latin America. For this reason, in our region, the cultivation of medicinal plants is particularly interesting and innovative. In Europe, France is the reference country for this type of production, while in Italy the cultivation of medicinal herbs has always been relegated to marginal areas because the flat areas have traditionally been used for more profitable crops. For that

reason, the Italian cultivation of medicinal plants is often adopted in hill or mountain areas, in limited areas and on land not suited to other more profitable crops. Iris is known and appreciated since ancient times for the properties of its dried rhizomes. For centuries, Iris has been used both in the medical and cosmetic sectors: as a remedy against coughs, against snake bites and depression, for perfumes, powders, soaps and pigments.



Iris cultivation could be an innovative solution for the production of product for medical and cosmetic sectors.

Gianni Pruneti



The cultivation of Iris in terraced hills offers important ecosystem services, preserving the typical landscape value of Central Italy.

<https://youtu.be/DouLyJxImk>

Chiantilife

watch video

## HOW IS THE CHALLENGE ADDRESSED

### How to cultivate Iris

Iris is a robust plant that can grow in any type of soil, even in full sun and without any special need for fertilisation. Among the many varieties that exist in nature, the most suitable for cultivation in our hills is *Iris pallida*. It is very easy to grow. Since it has a rhizome, it does not need to be re-planted annually. The renewal of the plants can be done easily every 3 - 4 years. In the spring period it is

necessary manually control weeds around the plant. This operation also improves water availability in the summer months. Three years after the planting of the cuttings, using a particular tool, the iris can be unearthed and the root shaken to separate the plant from the rhizome, then the rhizome cleaned. Sliced rhizome pieces are left to dry for 5 -6 days on nets.



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## HIGHLIGHTS

Iris is a hardy plant easy to grow. After 3 years growth, the plant is removed from the ground and it is immediately processed. The rhizome is separated from the cuttings that will be stored in a warehouse and they will be used for the next planting in October, while the rhizome is processed. The production of 1 ha of Iris, with a planting distance of 25-30 cm, results in about 3 - 5 tons of dried product.



White Iris drying: rhizomes are left to dry for 5-6 days on nets.

Vannetto Vannini

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## ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

### Simple but ... manual!

- Iris (*Iris spp.*) is a robust plant that can be grown in soils not suitable for other crops
- The plant is very suitable for intercropping in terraced olive groves
- When cultivated in the border of terraced olive orchards it doesn't cause an obstacle for mechanization
- The market of cosmetics offers good opportunities for the marketing of Iris derivatives
- The cultivation of Iris in terraced olive groves offers important ecosystem services, preserving the typical landscape value of central Italy
- The harvest is carried out mainly manually
- After planting, the Iris grows spontaneously, the only care needed is manage weeds, which are the main risk for the crop
- The rhizomes can be sold as "black" or "white". The latter are more valuable but require further processing, peeling, also carried out manually

### FURTHER INFORMATION

<http://www.toscanagiaggiolo.it/contents/il-giaggiolo/>

<http://caivaldarnosuperiore.it/coltivazione-delliris-o-giaggiolo-tradizione-e-cultura-delle-genti-del-pratomagno/>

<https://www.gonews.it/2017/05/06/la-festa-onore-del-giaggiolo-fiore-simbolo-della-toscana/>

<https://chiantilife.wordpress.com/2015/09/09/giglio-iris-florentia-simbolo-firenze/>

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