



Egret Flower

Habenaria radiata, or egret flowers, are fussy, but well worth the trouble when you see these beautiful, birdlike flowers. This plant is indigenous to Japan where they grow in bogs. The plant is a hardy terrestrial orchid that thrives in humid conditions. It is often grown by orchid enthusiasts in containers instead of the ground, but is well suited to being planted in the ground. The soil must be kept uniformly moist (but not sitting in water) and if you do not have high humidity where they are planted it is a good idea to mist them daily. NOTE-they will not thrive in clay soil, nor can you put them in a pot with no drainage. The plant will die the instant it goes without water, and it will rot if it gets too much water – a tough balance. The growing plant needs both water and air at the roots.

When the bulb arrives it will be packed in a bag or box filled with coco-fiber. Within the coco-fiber you will find small bundles of damp paper towels. Wrapped inside the paper towels are small bulbs about the size of a peanut. These are the Egret Flower Bulbs. It is important that these small bulbs not dry out before they are planted.

They like well-drained soil with a lot of peat moss worked in. They are extremely tiny corms, approximately the size of a bean. We ship it wrapped in white tissue cocooned in coconut fibers. Start them in a pot until they are at least one inch tall. They may be kept in a pot or planted outside to zone after they are established.

Plant the corms approximately 1 inch deep (there is no “up” side). If there is a root started from the corm that goes root down but still 1” deep. You can mix a few of the coconut fibers in with the peat moss to help keep the soil loose so the roots get air. Also, they prefer slightly acidic soil, so it is a good idea to break up pine needles into small pieces or use pine bark placed on the top of the soil (pot). The plant itself is small and skinny so you may plant the corms 2 to 3 inches apart. The sprouting plants look like blades of grass. The flowering stem will come up in the center. Expect them to take 4 to 6 weeks before you see them sprout, and at least another 4 weeks for the stem to bloom.

Seeds almost never germinate for amateurs because propagation is triggered by specific bog bacteria indigenous to Japan. However, they are perennials and will come back annually when proper care is taken. After they bloom, they die back naturally. You should prune the flowering stem after the flower has died, but let the green blades “ripen” naturally to store energy in the corm. In the winter, their natural environment goes dry. If you grow them in pots do not water them after the leaves die. The pots can be stored in a dry environment (garage, closet, etc. as they don’t need light). If they are planted outside, they may not come back due to excessive moisture from winter rain/snow.

Freshen the soil in the pot for the next season by using a light application of all purpose fertilizer. Make sure that the soil is still loose so that the roots can breathe when it begins to grow. (Aerate the soil)

The plant is hardy to Zone 5, but if you live in a place where you have difficulty controlling moisture levels in the soil in winter consider digging the plant and bringing it inside. Use the following technique:

- After the last flower has faded begin withholding water to slowly dry it out (never allow it to become “bone-dry”).
- When the leaves begin to yellow and die (in fall) stop watering completely.
- Dig up the tiny peanut-sized bulbs and bring them inside.
- Place them in plastic zipper-type storage bags in barely moist vermiculite.
- Store these bags in the vegetable drawer of your refrigerator.
- Check the vermiculite once a month to be sure it isn’t too wet or too dry.
- Replant the bulbs in the garden next spring.

If you choose to leave your plants outdoors during the winter use lightweight mulch that will protect it from cold temperatures but will not hold excess water on the plant. Chopped leaves, hay, or straw are good choices.