

Ixia (Iridaceae)

If you want to create a rainbow of color in your garden, plant masses of *Ixias*! The name *Ixia* comes from the Greek word *ixos*, which refers to the sticky sap exuded by the plant. Some say *Ixia* is derived from an old Greek name for a plant noted for the variability of its coloring. There is also a beach named *Ixia* on the Island of Rhodes, in the Aegean Sea. The shipping ports of Greece were stops in the travels of *Ixia*.



The ancient city of Rodos was one of the busiest ports in the world. In 282 BC, the city erected an enormous statue of the Greek sun god Helios. Situated near the harbor, the 110-foot form of a man is known as The Colossus of Rhodes and is considered to be one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It is said that its very existence inspired the sculptor Auguste Bartholdi to create the Statue of Liberty. A terrible earthquake destroyed the city of Rodos and the Colossus.

Ixia, or African Corn Lily, has traveled around the world, but probably originated in South Africa. The genus consists of more than fifty species. They are also known as cornflowers and wandflowers.

Ixia blooms resemble coral bells, with a multitude of little flowers on a single wiry stem. The bulbs are tiny, shaped like a Hershey's kiss. Plant them in the late spring, three inches deep, with the tips up. Choose a hot, sunny, sheltered location. Place them in well-drained, rich, fertile soil in borders, beds, containers, or perennial gardens. They are at their very best on hot still days.

Ixia are not as hardy as other South African bulbs. They will probably come back for a few years, but a hard winter will do them in. So lift them and place them inside for the winter. Plant them back outside in April/May. Or leave them outside all winter and risk it. For the price of a Starbucks coffee you get a beautiful show of flowers in the summer. So what if they don't come back the next year? Gardening is like throwing an annual party—sometimes guests don't come back the next year. Don't take it personally.



The strikingly beautiful turquoise-green flowers of *Ixia viridiflora* have purple-black 'eyes.' This unusual form of *Ixia* has many-flowered spikes on tall, upright stems and narrow grass-like leaves. *Viridiflora* means green-flowered in Latin. They make excellent container plants. Unfortunately, the *Ixia viridiflora* corms do not multiply by producing offsets. They need to be propagated from seed. Although the corms are relatively short-lived, they are rapid growers.

Looking for something a bit easier? Then just pot *Ixia* bulbs and sink the pot in the ground during the growing season. Lift the pot before the first frost and store in a

dry location. Remember, the secret is fertile well-drained soil. No wet feet please!

Ixia have many hues and some have sweet fragrances. They will truly enhance any Pacific Northwest garden. So try growing at least a few of these treasures!

Resources

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[South African Bulbs](#), Jim Duggan Flower Nursery. Retrieved February 2, 2006.

[The Colossus of Rhodes](#). Retrieved February 2, 2006 from <http://www.faliraki-info.com/rhodes/colossus/>.

[Photograph of Ixia viridiflora](#). Retrieved January 28, 2006.