

White Cemetery Iris



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April is a good time to look for one of Texas' most prevalent heirloom iris - a tough survivor known as the 'White Cemetery Iris', or *Iris albicans*. It's a plant that has had a long journey getting to us - first used in North Africa as a decoration on gravesites, from there to Spain, and finally to the New World. It's a species cross that is unable to make seeds on its own, but spreads by being passed from hand to hand. You will often see it blooming where once a house stood, and it's able to survive unaided in pastures along the roadside, often half-buried in tall grasses and other wild flowers. The flash of blue-tinged white blooms give the plant's location away in the spring.

Although the usual time for digging and relocating bearded iris is during the dry time of late summer, when they are less liable to resent transplanting, the White Cemetery iris recovers well if dug during flowering. Trim off older portions of the rhizomes and cut the leaves back to 1/3 their length. Iris should be planted with the tops of the rhizomes almost out on the surface of the ground. They do not need coddling with extra water and fertilizer once established. This iris is an excellent choice for dry slopes or for using in a 'dry' or xeric landscape setting. Their spiky foliage makes a good contrast to low growing lantana,

lavender, rosemary or other mounding plants.

An often-repeated gardeners' tale about White Cemetery iris is that they "take over" patches of purple iris until very quickly the purple blooms are gone for good. Even though this should not happen, there are plenty of people who swear they have seen individual plants which began with purple flowers, then with purple and white, until finally only white remained.