



Iris cultivation in traditional olive orchards

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Iris (*Iris* spp.) is a hardy species usually cultivated in the border of arable lands on soil not adapted to other species. Hence, iris can grow in combination with olive groves in the border of the terraced without hampering the management of olive trees.

In Tuscany region, Italy, the most common iris species is *Iris pallida*. Iris cuttings can be planted in September at a distance of 25-30 cm between the olive tree rows. The species spontaneously grows and the management scheme requires just the control of natural grass. Harvesting takes place three years after planting, from mid-July to mid-September. The plant is removed from the ground and processed, from the rhizome the cuttings are separated, which will be used for the next planting. The rhizomes, cleaned from the leaves and the roots, are either peeled for the production of "white" rhizome, or broken with the skin for the production of "black" rhizome. The cultivation cycle is 3 years long and about 3.5 tons/ha of dry product can be obtained. From the rhizomes an essential oil called "Irone" is extracted, which besides being the most odorous constituent of the essence is an excellent perfume fixer, of which it reduces the volatility and therefore the evaporation maintaining the smell of perfume longer.



Figure 1. The cultivation of Iris in terraced hills offers important ecosystem services, preserving the typical landscape value of Central Italy.



Figure 2. Iris cultivation could be an innovative solution for the production of officinal product for medical and cosmetic sectors

References

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