



# Bucks Country Gardens

## Gardening With Iris The Homeowners Introductory Guide to Iris

The IRIS stans as one of the most important plant families to the gardener. The IRIS varied bloom times (March through July), height (4-inches), appearances (narrow-leaved and grassy to broad and fan-shaped), and growth requirements (moist and acidic soils to dry, sandy and alkaline soils) allow their use in a wide range of garden situations.

Though the family is varied, the flower structure is the same throughout – blooms consist of three upright petals (known as “standards”) and three horizontal or drooping “falls.” The Bearded Iris is named for the fuzzy beard that projects from the flower’s center, outward onto the upper portion of each “fall.” Siberian and Japanese Iris are considered beardless types. Iris are generally bulbous-rooted or rhizomatous (having thick, fleshy underground stems.) The following chart details some of the most popular types of IRIS in their order of bloom time:

NAME	BLOOM TIME/ HEIGHT	LIGHT REQUIREMENTS	CULTURAL;	COLOR	COMMENTS
IRIS reticulata	late February-March 6-8 inches	Sun-partial shade	Bulbous		Plant in fall in loose, well-drained soil
IRIS danfordiae	late February-March 4-6 inches	Sun-partial shade	Bulbous		Plant in fall in loose, well-drained soil
IRIS germanica (dwarf)	April-early May 8 inches	Sun	Rhizomatous BEARDED	many colors	mid-summer in sandy, well-drained soil
IRIS tectorum	mid-May 12 inches	Sun-partial shade	Japanese Roof Iris	lavender or white	Small rhizomes & arching fans that are effective as groundcover; graceful in form.
Iris germanica	mid-may 1-1/2 feet	Sun	Rhizomatous	many colors	plant in Border Bearded sandy, well-drained soil.
IRIS sibirica	mid to late May 1-1/2 to 3 feet	Sun	Siberian Iris	white ,lavender thru dark purple	Grassy-leaved & clump forming;; narrower than bearded types; plant in loose, moist soil- high in humus
IRIS germanica	late May-June 2 to 3-1/2 feet	Sun	Rhizomatous; Tall Bearded	many colors	wide fans of leaves, required sandy, well drained soil & slightly alkaline or neutral soil; divide every 3-4 years
Water IRIS	late May-June 2-4 feet	Sun-partial shade	Rhizomatous	generally blue (I. versicolor, forming I. pseudacorus, Louisiana yellow and hybrids; variety among hybrids	tall bold grassy leaves large clumps; likes moist soil & will grow out into standing water
IRIS ensata (formerly kaempferi)	June-July 2-5 feet	Sun	Japanese Iris	many colors	tall, grassy-leaved clumps, small rhizomes likes moist, rich soil though

Do not allow plant to stand in water during winter; acidic conditions flowers larger & flatter than most Iris; single and double flower varieties available.

IRISES, by nature, are vigorous plants, growing into large clumps in a few short years, eventually exhausting the soil's nutrients. They benefit from periodic division and transplanting. Generally they demonstrate the need for division by producing fewer, smaller flowers on shorter stems than normal. If you do see this occur or want to avoid it from happening, divide the clumps during July or August and replant into fresh soil (or plant in the same location after the soil has been revitalized with humus and fertilizer – such as 0-20-0, 5-10-10 or bulb food.) Leaves should be cut to half their height to compensate for the root disturbance. The clump should be cut into sections – each having several fans for the beardless types or individual fans for the bearded types. Water thoroughly after planting and then periodically until cold weather arrives.

Most IRIS are largely trouble-free but the Tall Bearded Iris (I. Germanica varieties) have several problems that can be treated as early as they are detected.

The Iris borer is a moth larvae that tunnels through the rhizome, eating it and spreading bacteria that causes a foul-smelling rot. To avoid major problems from this pest spray with an all-purpose insecticide (such as Malathion) several times – starting in the spring when the leaves are 2-3 inches tall and continuing until after bloom. (Cygon is an alternative spray with less frequent application.) As a preventative measure, avoid overcrowded conditions and leafy debris around the rhizomes – the place where the moths lay eggs for their future generations. Rhizomes like sun and good air circulation. However, if rot occurs, scrape off the soft part with a sterilized knife or spoon and pour a solution of 50% water and 50% Clorox over the scraped part; leave exposed to the air for proper healing.

Leaf spot fungus occurs during humid weather and causes large, dark ringed spots on the leaves. Though not deadly to the Iris plant it is unsightly and generally will affect overcrowded clumps first. Several applications of a broad range fungicide (such as Benomyl) during mid-summer will cure this disease.

The IRIS is beloved by many people, even to the extent that a hobby develops around just this one flower. Providing proper care for each different type is all that is needed to produce these showy, orchid-like flowers and the enjoyment can go on – year after year!