



# King County Iris Society

Encompassing the Greater Seattle/Metro area, the King County Iris Society is a group of active gardeners growing many kinds of irises. We are affiliated with the American Iris Society, meet monthly (except in the summer), and have great flower shows and plant sales. If you like to grow irises and want to learn more about them and meet other iris fans, we invite you to join us!!

[www.kcis.org](http://www.kcis.org)

# Why join KCIS?

- Monthly meetings
  - At the conclusion of the meeting we hold a drawing for the treasures that have been contributed as the evening's door prizes---newer iris hybrids, pots of iris species, iris artifacts and other garden goodies.
  - Informational programs of varying content, including notable speakers, slides of recent irises, judges' training sessions, interesting garden updates or activities
- Monthly KCIS newsletter
  - Information on upcoming Regional and AIS conventions and events
- Hosts of the KCIS at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show enter the Show for free!
- Early access to the KCIS Show in May
- Volunteers assisting with preparation and set-up for the Bearded and Beardless Sales receive free irises!
- Access to local experts
- Subscription to the semiannual newsletter of AIS Region 13, the local tri-state subdivision of the American Iris Society.
- Possibly earn points towards an American Iris Society membership which includes a quarterly national publication, the AIS Bulletin.
- Fun activities
  - Garden tours
  - Summer potluck picnic and auction
  - December Holiday party

**Most of all, share your joy of growing iris with others!**

## Iris Types Abbreviations

### Bearded

|       |                         |               |
|-------|-------------------------|---------------|
| AR/AB | Aril / Arilbred         |               |
| MDB   | Miniature Dwarf Bearded | 2"-8"         |
| SDB   | Standard Dwarf Bearded  | 8"-16"        |
| IB    | Intermediate Bearded    | 16"-27"       |
| BB    | Border Bearded          | 16"-27"       |
| MTB   | Miniature Tall Bearded  | 16"-25"       |
| TB    | Tall Bearded            | 27" or taller |

### Beardless

|     |                      |
|-----|----------------------|
| JA  | Japanese             |
| LA  | Louisiana            |
| PCN | Pacific Coast Native |
| SI  | Siberian             |
| SPU | Spuria               |

# Basic Iris Terminology

## Parts of the Iris Plant

**Fan:** One fan-shaped set of leaves per iris rhizome.

**Rhizome:** A rooted storage organ consisting of a more or less horizontal underground section of the plant.

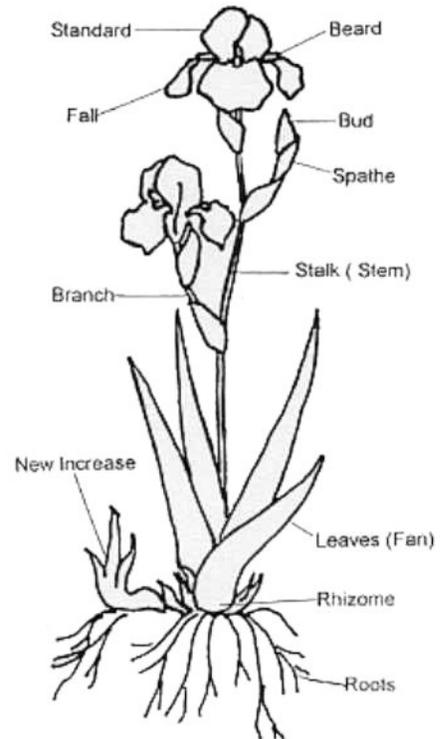
**Crown:** The point where the fan of leaves attaches to the rhizome.

**Increase:** New plants that begin from buttons on the sides of the rhizome.

**Stem:** Also referred to as a Stalk; holds flowers up.

**Branch:** A branch off of the main flower stem.

**Spur:** A branch ending in a single bud.



The Bearded Iris Plant

## Parts of the Iris Flower

**Spathe:** The papery covering surrounding emerging buds. It turns and protects the ovary as it develops.

**Standards:** The three upright petals of the iris flower.

**Falls:** The three lower petals of the iris flower that may either hang down or flare out.

**Beard:** The fuzzy 'caterpillar' from which bearded iris get their name. They are found at the base of the falls, towards the center of the flower.

**Haft:** The hafts are the base of the falls and standards where they begin narrow near the center of the flower. In older cultivars and some species the hafts of the falls are often marked with veins and lines.

**Pistil:** The female reproductive structure of a flower. In iris this consists of ovary, style-arms and stigma.

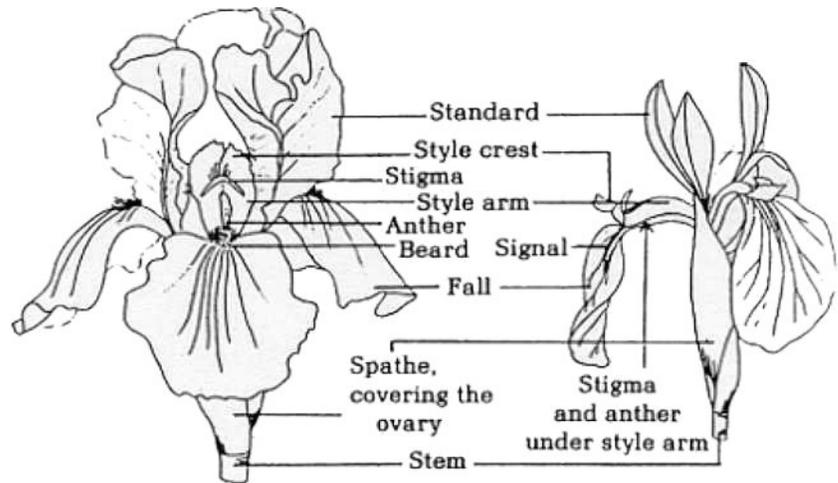
**Ovary:** The ovule-bearing part of the pistil at the base of the iris flower which develops after fertilization into the seedpod containing seeds derived from the ovules.

**Styles:** The part of the pistil that rises from the ovary and bears the stigma. In the iris, it branches into three flat arms that may or may not be the same color as the petals.

**Style Crest:** The flared end of a style arm, usually split into two projections and often serrated.

**Style Arm:** Three style arms the same or contrasting colors as the iris flower rest above the anthers.

**Stigma:** The part of the pistil that receives the pollen. In the iris, it is a lip projecting from the underside of the style arm, below the style crest.



Parts of the Iris Flower  
both Bearded and Beardless

**Stamen:** The male reproductive structure of a flower consisting of a filament, and an anther containing the pollen grains. They rest between the style arms and the falls.

**Anther:** Stiff, fuzzy, stem-like appendage under the style arm that holds pollen grains.

**Signal:** On beardless irises there is often a signal consisting of a bright contrasting spot of a different color that replaces the beard.

**Crest:** Instead of a signal or a beard, the crested or *Evansia* irises have a ridge or cockscomb of petal like material called a crest.

**Spur:** A short side stem that may or may not be near the top of the stigmatic lip.

**Stigmatic Lip:** The lip-like petal under the style crest which receives the pollen.

**Space Age Iris:** These irises have a horned, spooned or flounced extension on the beard

**Horned:** Horned iris have petal extrusions below the beard that curve up and away from the fall to form a pointed horn.

**Spoons:** Spoons are long stringy filaments that extend out from below the end of the beard and are tipped by small, cupped petaloids.

**Flounces:** Iris with flounces have multi-petaled fan shaped appendages without beards that rise from the center of the fall.

**Perianth Tube:** The bases of the petals join together into a tube that surrounds the style and extends down to the ovary. *Iris unguicularis* have very long perianth tubes that replace the stem and extend down to the ovary which is at ground level.

## Flower, Style and Color Terms

**Amoena:** White, or tinted white standards, colored falls.

**Bicolor:** Standards have a different color than the falls.

**Bitone:** Two tones of the same color, the Standards having a different tone of the Falls' color.

**Blend:** A mixed shading of two or more colors that occurs on the Standards, Falls, or both.

**Fluting:** Gentle dips and rises along the petal edges.

**Glaciata:** A pale color from plicata breeding- no plicata marking.

**Halo:** A rim of color around the petals.

**Lace:** Lightly laced petals have serrated edges; heavy lace gives a crinkled, serrated effect.

**Luminata:** Pale yellow or near white style arms with pale white or yellow veining on falls and a clear, unmarked area around the beards.

**Neglecta:** Blue standards with darker blue falls.

**Peppering:** A contrasting color dotted or sprayed over an iris with a yellow or white background color; generally found on plicatas.

**Plicata (also plic):** Stitched, stippled or banded color in contrast to the base color. Might also show peppering.

**Reverse Amoena:** Dark standards and white or pale tinted falls.

**Ruffles:** Vigorous or tight waving of the iris petal edges.

**Self:** Referent to an iris with all petals having the same color.

**Stippled:** Dotted, peppered or dashed.

**Stitching:** A dash-mark style pattern running in the same direction as the veins of the falls and/or standards. Often forms a visible rim around the petals.

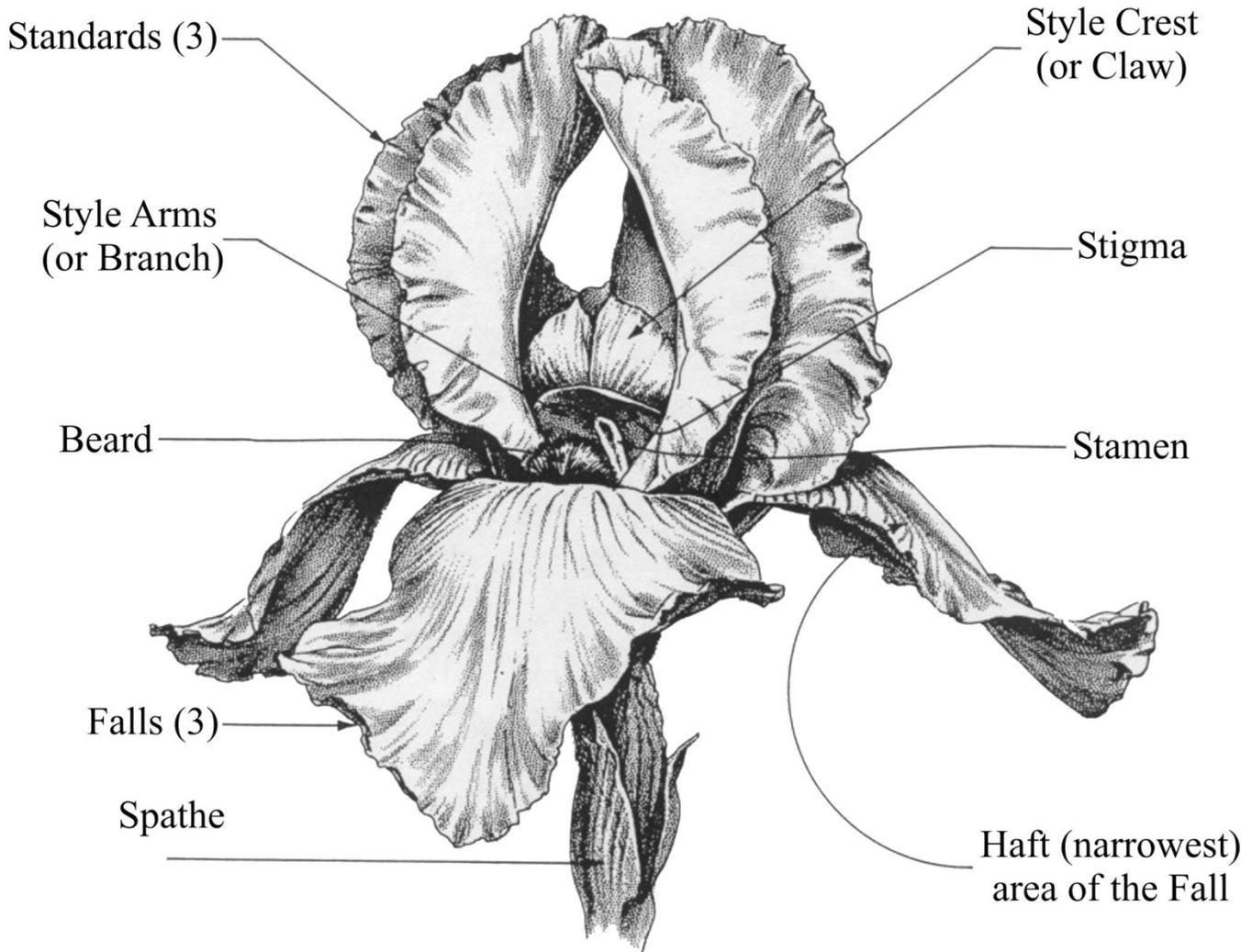
**Substance:** The thickness of the petals.

**Texture:** The finish or sheen of the petals.

**Variegata:** Yellow or near yellow standards with red or violet fall color or veining.

**Wire-edge:** A minute rim of color around the edges of the petals.

# Bearded Iris



## Parts of the Bearded Iris Flower

### Iris, Goddess of the Rainbow

**Iris** was the goddess of the rainbow, the messenger of the Olympian gods. She was often represented as the handmaiden and personal messenger of Hera, and was usually described as a virgin goddess. Iris was a goddess of sea and sky; her father, *Thaumas*, was a marine god, and her mother, *Elektra*, a cloud nymph. Coastal-dwelling Greeks believed that Iris replenished the rain clouds with water from the sea since the rainbow's arc spanned the distance between the clouds and the sea. Iris has no distinctive mythology of her own other than an errand-running messenger. Her name contains a double meaning, being connected both with *iris*, "the rainbow," and *eiris*, "messenger."

# Miniature Dwarf Bearded

## (MDB)

These are the smallest of the bearded irises, with stems from 2" to a maximum of 10". These tiny irises are very effective in the rock garden. They are the first of the bearded iris to bloom in early spring. MDB's should be planted in clumps for best effect.



# Standard Dwarf Bearded

## (SDB)

These irises bloom after the MDB's but before the Intermediates. They grow from 8" to 16". These irises have a wide range of colors and patterns since they were derived from crosses of TB's and MDB's and carry the colors and patterns of both. They are very useful at the front of the border or in front of taller bearded iris.



# Intermediate Bearded

(IB)

Intermediates grow from 16" to 27" and have their peak bloom after the SDB's but before the TB's. These are some of the most useful plants we have for the garden. Because they were created by crossing SDB's with TB's they also carry the patterns and colors of both dwarfs and TB's.



# Border Bearded

(BB)

This group is the same height (16" to 27 ½") as the IB's but blooms at the same time as the TB's. The entire plant (bloom, stalk and foliage) should be a proportionately smaller version of a TB.

# Miniature Tall Bearded (MTB)

This class has the strictest classification. The height range is 16" to 25 " with a height of 21 " to 22" preferred. The class is distinguished by daintiness and delicacy. The blooms should be small and carried on slender, wiry, flexuous stems. The MTB's are often called "table iris" because they are well suited for floral arrangements.



# Tall Bearded

(TB)

These irises have flowers stalks over 27" in height. They should be well branched and have many buds. This class has a wide range of colors and patterns and can also often displays features such as ruffles and lacing.



# Aril/ Arilbred

## (AR/AB)

The largest of the Aril iris are native to Israel at the south end of the Dead Sea. They are also found in Iran, Jordan, Turkey and north into Russia. The *oncocyclus* subspecies have one bloom on 6" to 19" stems, while the *regelia* subspecies more often has two flowers on 9" to 22" stems. Flowers come in a wide range of colors with veins, dots, spots or signals. Arilbred irises are produced from crosses between bearded and aril iris. They are generally have easier cultivation requirements and are a bit hardier in moist climates.

- OGB- indicates quarter Aril
- OGB indicates quarter Aril
- OGB+ indicates three quarters Aril



# Bearded Iris Culture

Prepare a soil bed that is friable at least 10" deep. Place the rhizome just beneath the surface with the roots spread out and deeper than the rhizome. Soil should be neutral to slightly alkaline.

**DEPTH TO PLANT:** Place your rhizomes just below the surface of the ground with the roots well spread out underneath so the rhizome is within reach of the warmth of the sun's rays while the roots beneath are in moist (not soggy) soil. Be sure to firm the soil lightly around each rhizome when planting.

**DISTANCE APART:** Depends on your particular plans. Generally irises are planted from 8 inches to 2 feet apart. Planting three of one kind in a triangle, single rhizomes 8-15" apart with the fans pointing outward, will create a massed effect but will need to be divided every 2 years. If the plants are set about 2 feet apart they will need dividing only every third or fourth year. The best planting time is July through September in the Northwest area. When dividing, dig the plant, remove and discard the old center rhizomes and replant the new fans. You may cut out the old centers with a knife while they are in the ground if you do not wish to lift the plant.

Care of the plants is relatively simple. Keep weeds and grass tufts out of the rhizome clumps. Cultivate shallowly, since the feeder roots are near the surface. Newly-set plants should be kept moist until the roots are growing well. Established plants rarely need watering except during prolonged dry spells; at such times, deep, infrequent watering is best.

Fertilizer should be applied as a side dressing in early spring, and then again after bloom. It can burn rhizomes, so apply it around, but not on, the rhizome. Too much nitrogen promotes soft, lush growth which is susceptible to rot, so a 5-10-10, super phosphate or similar formula is best.

Air circulation and sanitation are the best problem preventatives. Remove old iris leaves and other debris from around the base of the plant. Aphids, caterpillars, etc. may damage the flowers, but rarely do serious harm to the plant. Slugs love to nibble at new shoots and will even climb and attack the tall leaves of some varieties. Old bloom stalks should be cut or broken off at ground level - but healthy, green foliage should NOT be cut off. It need to be left on the plant to foster development of new sprouts for the next season.

During the growing season, the plants may be sprayed, along with roses and other perennials, with a combination insecticide-fungicide spray at regular intervals - usually 10 days to 2 weeks. In some years, usually warm, wet ones, leaf spot can make the leaves unsightly. Cutting off the spotted leaves will improve the appearance of the garden and retard the spread of disease.

Mulching of bearded iris is to be avoided. If you desire to mulch, do not cover the rhizomes. The sun must reach them to facilitate development of next year's increase. Freezing weather will not harm the rhizomes, other than causing slight "heaving" out of the ground. If this occurs, simply cover the exposed roots with additional soil.

# Dividing Bearded Irises



1. Dig clump using a garden fork

2. Wash away soil



3. Split clump into smaller groups



4. Select the healthiest, largest rhizomes and cut or break away from old rhizome

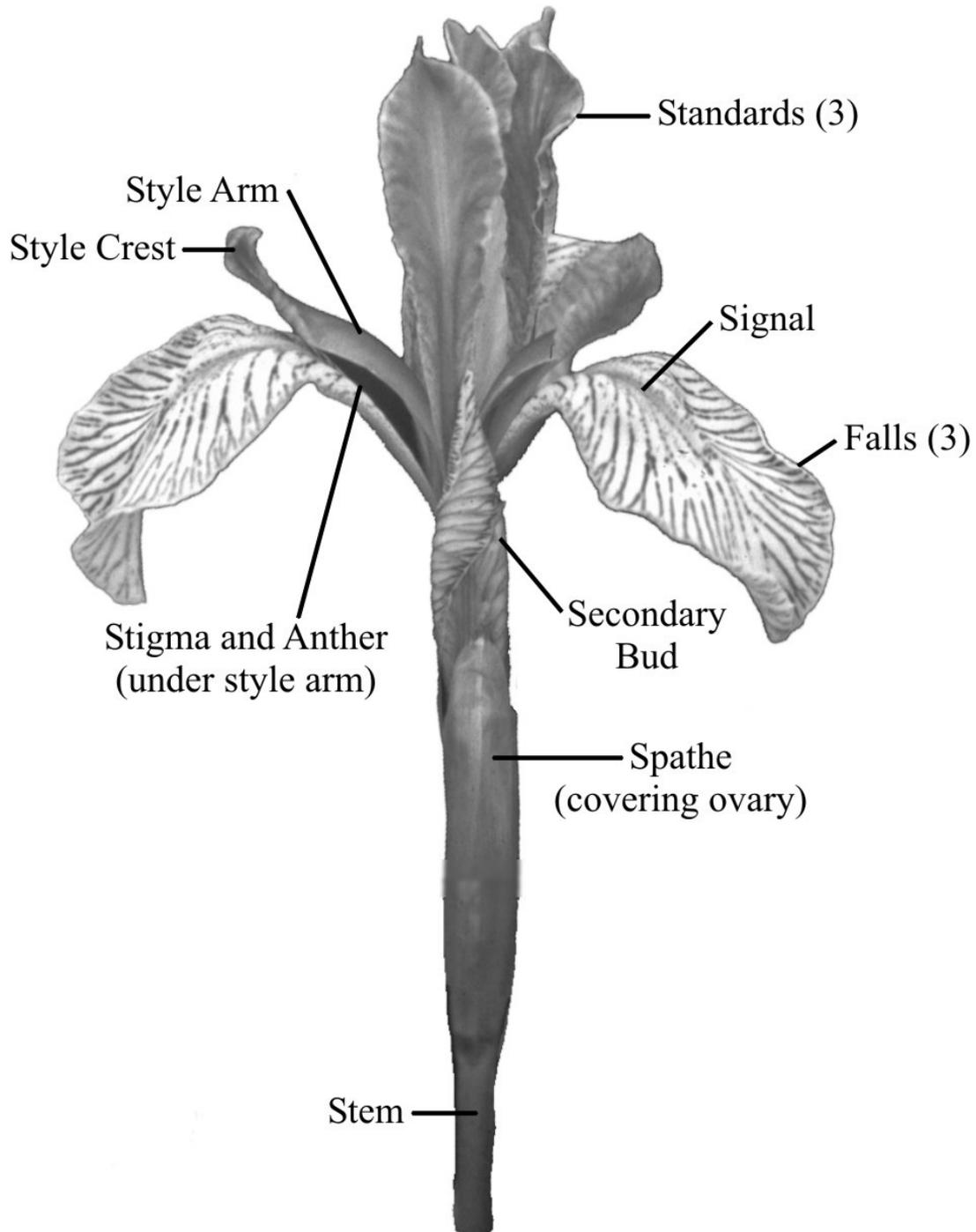
5. Trim foliage to about half; a sharp peak (  $\wedge$  ) at the top is traditional

6. For a quick fill of garden space, replant 3 rhizomes in a triangular pattern with the rhizomes heels in the center



**Keep only the best and compost the rest!**

# Beardless Iris



Beardless Iris Flower Parts

# Japanese Iris

(JI)

Japanese irises require a moist and slightly acid soil and present some of the most spectacular flowers of all the irises. Blooms are usually huge; they can be ruffled or flared, flat or pendant in form; some are marbled with gray or white. Japanese hybridizers have worked with them for over 500 years. These irises bloom about a month after the Tall Bearded iris. They prefer full sun and ordinary garden conditions, but require ample moisture, especially up to bloom time. They will do very well beside a stream or a pond but in cold climates they do not like to have their roots in water during the winter. Japanese irises prefer a heavy, rich soil with ample organic matter. The soil pH should be slightly acid, ideally between pH 5.0 to pH6.5. They do not like lime, so do not plant close to cement, as lime leaches out of it.

Plant strong divisions of 2-3 fans. The roots should never dry out during transplanting. Plant the rhizome 1-2 inches deep, preferably in a 3-4 inch depression, which will catch and hold moisture. Since new roots form above the old ones, soil may be gradually added to fill in the depression over 3 years or so, to maintain plant vigor for a longer period of time. Keep division well watered after planting, until established. Japanese irises are heavy feeders. A liberal application of a balanced fertilizer, such as 12-12-12, in the early spring and just after bloom is helpful.



# Louisiana Iris

(LA)

Louisiana irises are native to the American Gulf Coast. Louisiana irises bloom after Tall Bearded but before Japanese iris. They are at home in a wide variety of soil types, but prefer acid soil and boggy areas with at least half a day of sun. They can be grown in regular perennial beds, with additional water during the growing season. Under ideal growing conditions Louisiana irises are robust growers. The blooms are usually very wide petaled and open, showing brightly colored style-arms and crisp signals.

Transplant Louisiana's from August to September to allow growth to be established before winter. Plants should be spaced at least 2 ft. apart, with the growing tip facing in the direction you want them to grow. Plant rhizomes horizontally with about 2 in. of soil covering them and water until established. If planted in a triangle, they can be left in place 2-3 years without becoming overcrowded. Ample quantities of organic matter (peat, compost or manure) along with a balanced fertilizer help these heavy feeders. A foliar feeding every 10 days, plus ample water, is helpful in short season areas like Seattle, to get vigorous, uninterrupted growth during the entire season. Be sure to mulch heavily before cold weather sets in.



# Pacific Coast Native Iris

(PCI / PCN)

Also known as Californicae (CA), Pacific Coast Native irises as are much sought after in the Pacific Northwest as our climatic conditions are ideal for them. Their graceful and dainty flowers bloom April to June on stems 1' to 2' tall, in a wide variety of striking colors and patterns. These irises thrive in the marine coastal climate, with dry summers and cool, wet winters. Plants are very prolific and grow readily from seed.

Transplanting, however, can be difficult. They are best moved or divided in the early fall, when root growth is active and can continue well into winter. Plants can also be moved prior to spring bloom.

Transplants must be kept well watered until natural rainfall can maintain high soil moisture. They should be heavily mulched with bark dust, pine needles or leaves, to prevent frost damage to newly developing roots. Once established, plants are usually tolerant of normal freezes and periods of drought. If frost damage occurs to leaves, wait until well into spring to watch for signs of new growth. PCNs should receive at least a half a day of sunshine.



# Siberian Iris

(SIB)

As their name suggests, Siberian irises need cold and wet conditions to perform well. Siberians are a hardy beardless iris growing from 2-4 ft. in height. They bloom at the end of the tall bearded season. The blooms are mostly blue, violet and white with large falls and smaller standards. They are very effective in naturalized settings and perennial borders and are most attractive in established clumps. Siberians perform best in full sun, but can tolerate less. Good drainage is critical. Siberians like year round moisture, but not soggy conditions. They should be kept moist during spring. A light fertilizing in the spring and again after bloom encourages strong growth and good bloom.

Newly purchased or received Siberian rhizomes should be soaked in water overnight before planting. When planting, cover the rhizomes with 2-3 in. of soil, spacing plants about 2 ft. apart. Siberians like acid soil, which may be enhanced with peat moss, compost or other humus. New plants should be kept well watered.

When the foliage dies back in the fall it should be cut off close to the ground and removed from the garden. Siberians need 2-3 years to become fully established; the first year's bloom is not representative.



# Spuria Iris

## (SPU)

Spuria irises are tall, 2 to 5 feet in height, and elegant with attractive foliage. Bloom shape suggests orchids and the colors range from white and yellow through blue, wine and brown, often with bright yellow signals. Spuria irises display their open, delicate blooms atop tall, rugged plants about 1-2 weeks after the Tall Bearded Iris. Spuria irises grow well in all types of garden soil, preferring neutral to slightly alkaline soils. Full sun and good drainage are imperative. They do not like wet feet.

When planting, cover the rhizomes with 2 inches of soil. Space plants at least 2 feet apart. After planting, water in well and water regularly until plants are established. In future years, the plants need water before bloom, but there is no need to water after blooming, although doing so won't hurt them. An application of composted manure or commercial fertilizer will enhance growth. Do not expect peak performance until the second or third year. Spurias should be left alone for years, allowing the plants to grow into the large clumps for which they are noted.



# Species Iris

Species irises are those irises that have not been hybridized into existence by human intervention. They are also the original genetic material from which today's beautiful hybrids are created. Genetically speaking, follow a Tall Bearded iris roots (no pun intended) back far enough and you will find *Iris germanica*. Then follow a lateral hybridization of Tall Bearded iris with *Iris pumila* and you will find today's Standard Dwarf Bearded iris.

Just as do our hybridized iris, species iris come in many forms and colors, and grow in a wide variety of conditions. Several species grow well in the Pacific Northwest and are suitable for many landscape situations.



# Iris, Most Beautiful Flower

*Iris, most beautiful flower,  
Symbol of life, love, and light;  
Found by the brook, and the meadow,  
Or lofty, on arable height.  
You come in such glorious colors,  
In hues, the rainbow surpass;  
The chart of color portrays you,  
In petal, or veins, of your class.  
You bloom with the first in Winter,  
With the last, in the Fall, you still show;  
You steal the full beauty of Springtime,  
With your fragrance and sharp color glow.  
Your form and beauty of flower,  
An artist's desire of full worth;  
So Iris, we love you and crown you,  
**MOST BEAUTIFUL FLOWER ON EARTH!***

Edith Buckner Edwards  
AIS bulletin January 1961