

# How to Grow Iris

## Care, Feeding and Growth

### Today's Iris

You may have thought Bearded Iris were only blue or purple. Or you may have thought they were difficult to grow. Wrong. Today's hybrid Bearded Iris come in a rainbow of colors and they are one of the easiest perennials to grow. With a minimum of effort they will reward you with beautiful blooms year after year. These few suggestions on growing Iris are all simple and proper care is quite easy. Treat yourself to some of these fine Iris.

### When to Plant

For best results, Iris should be planted in July, August or September. It's imperative that the roots of newly planted Iris be well established before the growing season ends. In areas with hot summers and mild winters, September or October planting may be preferred.

### Where to Plant

Iris need at least a half day of sun. In our climate Iris do best in full sun. Be sure to provide your Iris good drainage, planting either on a slope or in raised beds.

### Soil Preparation

Iris will thrive in most well-drained garden soils. If your soil is heavy, peat moss or humus may be added to improve drainage. Gypsum is an excellent soil conditioner that can improve most clays. The ideal pH is 6.8 (slightly acidic), but Iris are tolerant in this regard. To adjust the pH of your soil, lime may be added to acidic soils or sulfur to alkaline soils. It is always best to have your soil analyzed before taking corrective measures.

### Depth to Plant

Iris should be planted so the tops of the rhizomes are exposed and the roots are spread out facing downward in the soil. In very light soils covering the rhizome with 1 inch of soil may be desirable. Firm the soil around each rhizome and then water to help settle the soil. A common mistake is to plant iris too deeply. Proper depth is critical.

### Distance Apart

Iris are generally planted 18 to 24 inches apart. Close planting gives an immediate effect, but closely planted Iris will need to be thinned often. Plants spaced further apart will need less frequent thinning. Distance apart varies according to effect desired.

### Watering

Newly set plants need moisture to help their root systems become established. Specific watering information depends on your climate and your soil, but keep in mind that deep watering at long intervals is better than more frequent shallow waterings. Once established, Iris normally don't need to be watered except in arid areas. Overwatering is a common error.

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### Fertilization

Specific fertilizer recommendations depend on your soil type, but bone meal, or superphosphate are all effective. A light application in the early spring and a second light application about a month after bloom will reward you with good growth and bloom. Avoid using anything high in nitrogen, as nitrogen encourages rot problems.

### Thinning Old Clumps

Iris need to be thinned or divided before they become overcrowded, generally every 3-4 years. If iris are allowed to become too crowded the bloom will suffer, some varieties may crowd others out and disease problems may be aggravated. Old clumps may be thinned by removing the old divisions at the centers of the clumps and leaving new growth in the ground. Or, you may dig up the entire clump and remove and replant the large new rhizomes.

### General Garden Care

Keep your Iris beds clean and free of weeds and debris, allowing the tops of the rhizomes to bask in the sun. Bloom stems should be cut off close to the ground after blooming. Healthy green leaves should be left undisturbed, but diseased or brown leaves should be removed.

### Types of Bearded Iris

**Dwarf Bearded:** These miniature gems display their splendid bloom early in the spring. Ranging in height from 5 to 15", these delightful Iris are perfectly suited for edgings, borders or rock gardens.

**Intermediate Bearded:** Blooming after the Dwarfs and reaching in height from 16 to 28", these cheerful Iris will brighten your garden and mix well with other favorite spring bloomers.

**Tall Bearded:** These are the gorgeous queens of the Iris world, with magnificent 6 inch blooms displayed on stems over 29" high. The later blooming flowers are available in every color of the spectrum and include an incredible variety of color patterns and combinations.

### Dividing & Planting Bearded Iris

- 1: Bearded irises need to be divided every four or five years to keep their vigor. Soon after the flowers fade, pry the entire clump gently out of the ground with a spading fork.
- 2: After washing the soil from the roots, trim the healthy leaves to a length of 4-6"; remove any shriveled leaves and dead flower stalks. If plants show any signs of iris borers or disease discard or burn the stalks and leaves; do not put them in a compost pile.
- 3: With a knife, cut off the fleshy outer roots so you get V-shaped pieces, each with two fans of leaves. Discard the old center root. If pieces contain borers, cut these out; dust the cuts with all purpose fungicide to prevent rot.
- 4: Plant each root division in a hole made by plunging a trowel to its hilt into the soil, then pulling it up and toward you. Hold the division against the straight side of the hole, with the top of the roots just above the surface. Fill in and firm the soil until level.