

# How to grow Beardless Iris

## Introduction

There are over a hundred beardless species Iris. From these have been developed several thousand garden worthy hybrids, particularly in six groups: the bulbous Iris, the Japanese Iris, the Louisiana Iris, The Pacific Coast Iris, the Siberian Iris and the Spuria Iris. For more information, we suggest that you refer to The World of Iris published by and available through the American Iris Society.

Most beardless can be transplanted only during periods of active root growth - typically late fall through early spring. Watering requirements, fertilizer, transplant time and disease prevention differ for each type. A few require dense shade, many do well with partial shade, most do well in full sun. In general, the beardless Iris require more water than the bearded Iris, particularly during active growth. Fertilizer, if required, is best applied at planting time or in the early spring.

## A Few Significant Species Iris

The evansias or crested Iris are adapted to partially shady, moist garden conditions. Species are divided into two major groups based on frost tolerance. *I. tectorum*, the roof Iris of Japan, and the miniature *I. cristata* are hardy, and the foliage is winter deciduous. *Iris confusa*, *Iris nada*, *Iris waltii*, *Iris japonica* and the other evansias which bear their flowers at the end of a multi-branched cane-like growth are frost tender and have evergreen foliage. All evansias are considered delicacies by the slugs and snails.

*Iris foetidissima* is the species known as the "scarlet seeded Iris". The flowers are inconspicuous in shades of khaki. This Iris is grown for the seed pods which split in late fall to reveal seeds with a bright scarlet fleshy coat. The seeds adhere throughout the winter to the inside of the pods. Foliage on the most common type is deep green in color and evergreen. There are two variegated foliage cultivars: one has cream and green variegated foliage; the other has foliage which is deep green mottled liver brown. *Iris foetidissima* is tolerant of a wide range of soil conditions, but must be grown in moderate to deep shade. Bloomstalks are about 18 inches tall.

*Iris laevigata* is a water Iris native to alkaline soils in China. Foliage is winter deciduous. This is one of the very few Iris which require moist conditions that will grow in alkaline soils. Flowers are either white, lavender blue, purple or white with the edges splotched purple depending on the variety. Bloomstalks will be two to 2-1/2 feet tall, depending on culture.

*Iris pseudacorus* is the species which served as the inspiration for the fleur-de-lis emblem of the kings of France. Foliage is winter deciduous and is grass green during active growth. There is a cream and green variegated foliage type. Small (about 2-inches) yellow or cream flowers, with a brown halo around the Signal area on the falls, are borne on branched stalks up to six feet high. This Iris is now naturalized along pond and stream banks throughout the temperate northern hemisphere. If you want yellow flowers in a water Iris, this is the beastie for you.

*Iris setosa* is an Alaskan native and needs a good winter chill to bloom well. Bloomstalks are branched, about two feet tall and bear blue-violet or white flowers with three

page 1 of 2 heart shaped falls and standards which are reduced to a tiny pointed rib.

*Iris virginica* and *Iris versicolor* are native to the eastern United States. Foliage is winter deciduous. It grows about two feet long by mid-summer and arches gracefully. The heavily veined flowers range from white thru all shades of lavender and blue-violet. The ideal culture is one which duplicates the moist meadowland or streamside conditions where they are found in nature.

*Iris unguicularis* is the winter blooming Iris. Cut down the foliage in late October and enjoy the blooms which arise directly from the top of the rhizome from mid November until early spring or killing frost, whichever comes first in your climate. Flowers are white or blue-violet or lavender-blue with conspicuous yellow and white signals. This Iris is tolerant of a wide range of growing conditions including poor soil. *Iris unguicularis* is also tolerant of a wide range of light conditions, thriving in full sun to full afternoon shade. However, it will not tolerate standing water.

## Bulbous Iris

A highly variable group, the Bulbous Iris include the tiny reticulatas, the well known Dutch or florist Iris, the English Iris and the Spanish Iris. Purchase from a specialty bulb company.

Plant in a well drained, gritty soil. The bottom of the bulb should be planted three to four times the height of the bulb below the surface of the soil. The reticulatas need a good winter chill to perform well. Dutch may be grown in the garden or forced into bloom in pots, depending on variety. The English Iris require a moist, cool location the year round. The Spanish Iris require alkaline soil, sharp drainage, full sun and protection from summer watering.

## Japanese Iris

Sometimes called the dinner plate Iris, Japanese Iris have a "flat" or pendant flower composed of three (single form), six (double form) or rarely nine or twelve (peony form) petals. On most varieties (and depending on the severity of your winters) the foliage will die in the winter and reappear in the spring. Peak bloom is about a month after peak Tall Bearded bloom.

Flower color range is limited, but the patterns are the most diverse of any group. There are self (solid color), haloed, veined, edged, rimmed, ruffled, bearded and double. 252 0011 cm BT 00

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## **Juno Iris**

These Iris resemble a miniature sweet corn plant with waxed leaves and small fleshy Iris flowers strategically placed in the upper leaf axils.

Color range of the flowers varies from white to deep blue and red-purple set off with a conspicuous golden signal or crest. However, the types most commonly available are white, cream or pale yellow.

They are grown from bulbs to which thick fleshy roots adhere, even during dormancy. Try not to break the roots off during transplanting, since they store almost as much food for the plant as the bulb. Preferred soil conditions are alkaline, gritty and well drained.

## **Louisiana Iris**

The Louisiana Iris are derivatives of the Iris species of the Gulf Coast states. The hybrids have flower forms varying from nearly flat to gracefully drooping. Peak bloom is slightly later than peak Tall Bearded Iris bloom, with a large overlap in the two seasons.

Flowers come in all colors except orange. The flower may or may not have a contrasting signal area in the center of each fall. There are a few bitone or bicolor patterns.

The Louisiana Iris are probably the easiest beardless Iris to cultivate. Like the Japanese they require rich, acid soil and plenty of moisture. They are tolerant of partial (but not dense) shade and will thrive under bog conditions. They do, however, need lots of room since the rhizomes tend to "walk" or grow very long rather than staying in a tight clump. Height of the bloomstalk ranges from eighteen inches to five feet with most hybrids falling in the 2-1/2 to 3-1/2 foot range.

Divide every two to three years.

## **Pacific Coast Iris**

A highly variable group, the Pacific Coast Iris (PCI) are graceful derivatives of the Iris nativeo