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Irises just keep getting better all the time



Walking through a garden of Irises can brighten anyone's day.

Bearded irises are flamboyant flowers with their gorgeous colors and ruffled petals and falls. I have admired them for years, but shied away from adding them to my garden, because I have been afraid of soft rot and the dreaded iris borer.

However, I recently visited a friend's iris garden and she convinced me that irises don't have problems if you plant them properly and follow good sanitation practices in the fall.

Bearded irises are such a popular flower that the hybridizers have been busy improving them for the past 40 years and now they bloom longer on sturdier plants that rarely need staking, and in more beautiful colors than ever before. They do not naturalize the way the old flags did, but they can be placed in a mixed perennial border or planted in beds devoted to iris to great advantage.

In our climate, bearded iris begin to flower before the first of June and some varieties will still be blooming at the end of July. July is the ideal time to plant or divide and transplant bearded irises, ideally before the middle of the month. This will allow the plant plenty of time to develop a good root system that will hold it firmly in place and less likely to heave out with frost during the winter. Frost heaving is the main cause of winter kill.

Bearded iris grow from large rhizomes which send up a fan of sword-like leaves and a blooming stalk. During the growing season this rhizome also produces other rhizomes that will produce blooming plants the following year, but then it dies. When you divide your plants this old dried up rhizome should be discarded. Depending on the variety, bearded iris should be divided every three or four years. If you buy your rhizomes from a nursery, they will come with the tall leaves cut to a height of 4 inches. This will leave you enough leaf to feed the rhizome while roots are developing.

If you are dividing irises, the leaves should be cut first. Then separate each new rhizome, which could be said to resemble a small whitish carrot with long feeder roots, from the clump and plant in full sun where the soil is sweet, and very well drained. The bearded iris needs to be grown in a dry location. The planting bed should be prepared without any

Pat
Leuchtman

Between
The Rows



Do not use manure. Nitrogen will encourage lots of lush foliage but no blooms.

Bearded iris do like a soil that is rich in phosphorus which you can provide by adding rock phosphate or bone meal. Dig a good sized hole and then hold the rhizome so that it is level with the top of the ground, letting the feeder roots dangle into the hole, and fill in with soil. It is important to leave the top of the rhizome exposed to the sun, it must not be covered. Water the iris after planting, but after that don't worry about dry weather.

Bearded iris come in almost every color imaginable from the deepest violet, even black, to unusual shades of brown and buff to pale pastels and white. Unfortunately, in our severe northeastern climate the very deepest colors and the brown shades are not reliably hardy. There are also bi-color arrangements.

The American Iris Society (6518 Beachy Ave., Wichita, KA 67206, \$9.50 annual dues) puts out lists of award winners and recommended varieties which include One Desire (pink), Gold Galore (yellow), St. Louis Blues (deep purple), Lace Cotton (white) and Stepping Out, a plicata which means it is white with a blue edging.

In the fall make sure the garden is neat. Pull off the outer leaves that are drying and remove them. Don't cut back the other leaves. Iris borers lay their eggs in garden debris. When they hatch in the spring the larvae enter the fan of iris leaves and feed for about two weeks before they start destroying the rhizome. If your iris leaves have holes or a slimy bleeding you probably have borers.

I've ordered a purple, a pink and a white that bloom in early June, a magnificent addition to my spring garden. Source: Schroeder's, 3625 Quimby Rd NE, Salem, OH 44703 catalog \$3. Coolidge's, 4453 Silverton Rd NE, P.O. Box 126F, Silverton, Oregon 97381 catalog \$2. Wayside Gardens, Hodges, SC 29025 catalog free.



The bearded iris is indeed a beautiful flower.

Garden calendar

This information is provided by the Franklin County Cooperative Extension Service. Now is the time to:

• Inspect garden plants at least once a week to detect problems before they get out of hand. For example, the removal of the stems of one

Tomatoes, marigolds perfect additions to backyard gardens

Associated Press

This is the "Year of the Tomato and Marigold."

So says the National Garden Bureau, a non-profit group supported by the seed industry.

"The tomato and marigold are easy to grow, providing ample

Chile. Historians speculate that animals helped spread seeds northward more than 2,000 miles from its center of origin. The Aztecs were the first people to cultivate, eat and name the tomato — tomatl or xtomatl.

Modern tomatoes are descended from the wild cherry tomato

treatment of hiccups, being struck by lightning, or "for one who wishes to cross a river or water safely."

Marigold seeds are large, easy to handle and germinate reliably in warm, moist soil. Soil should be draining, with a fine, loose texture