

Planting & Growing Bearded Iris

The German Perennial Performer



What Are They?

The rhizomatous bearded or German Irises are widely cultivated in Nebraska. They are characterized by a tuft of “hair” on the flowers lower petals or falls. Bearded Iris are offered in dwarf, intermediate or tall varieties. Many favorites grow 2-4 feet tall. While most bloom in May and June some “re-blooming” types will re-flower in early fall. Colors are available in a wide range of white, blue, lavender, yellow, pink, orange, reddish brown and almost black. Bicolor combinations can include all the above colors and more.

Planting Depth

Place the rhizome in the planting hole so 1/3 of the fleshy root is above the soil line. Iris planted deeper will not bloom and can easily develop rot. If several iris are planted together, space them in a circle, leaves turned outward. If leaves turn inward, the growth will soon center and become crowded.

Dividing

It is a good idea to dig up bearded iris every 4 to 5 years so the weak rhizomes can be removed and the soil reworked and fertilized. In late July and August cut the leaves back halfway, lift the clumps, then with a sharp knife, cut the rhizomes into pieces so that each has 1 to 3 strong fans of leaves attached. Any soft tissue or tissue damages by borers should be cut away. The separated rhizomes should be soaked in a 1 to 5 ration solution of bleach water for several hours.

General Care Tips

1. A light wood mulch of 1" or less in late fall will help insulate the roots. Do not use rock mulches around iris
2. Control borers with several applications of Permethrin or Malathion two weeks apart from late April through mid May. By controlling the borers, bacterial soft rot should not occur.
3. As soon as the blossoms on the stems have faded, cut the flower stalks halfway down leaving foliage to hide the stumps. If cut too close to the rhizomes, the stems may rot.
4. During July, the first drying leaves of the iris will droop. Remove these. Left on the plant, they will shut out the sunlight for the rhizomes and give the plant an unkempt appearance. A gardening mistake is to cut all the leaves as soon as the blooms fade. The leaves must be allowed to grow and produce food for the rhizomes to store for the following season.



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