

# Iris - A Flower for all Seasons

Courtesy of the King County Iris Society  
www.kcis.org

Considering all of the various forms of iris, it is possible to have some type of iris in bloom throughout the year! The chart below is a graphical demonstration of this.

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Aril/Arilbred (AR/AB)				✓	✓							
Border Bearded (BB)					✓	✓						
Dutch Iris				✓	✓							
English Iris					✓	✓						
Intermediate Bearded (IB)				✓	✓							
<i>Iris foetidissima</i> (Seed pods are showy)	✓				✓					✓	✓	✓
<i>Iris japonica</i>					✓							
<i>Iris reticulata</i> varieties	✓	✓	✓									
<i>Iris unguicularis</i>	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓
Japanese						✓	✓	✓				
Louisiana					✓	✓						
Miniature Dwarf Bearded (MDB)			✓	✓								
Miniature Tall Bearded (MTB)				✓	✓							
Pacific Coast				✓	✓							
Reblooming Bearded			✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	
Siberian					✓	✓						
Spuria						✓	✓					
Standard Dwarf Bearded (SDB)				✓	✓							
Tall Bearded (TB)					✓	✓						

- Within each classification of iris there is a further sub-classification determined by the bloom time and each variety is granted a designation of “Very Early” through “Very Late”. When utilizing iris in the landscape, consideration of bloom time can greatly prolong the length of the show.
- In the Pacific Northwest, effects of microclimates can be very pronounced and affect blooming times dramatically. Two of the same varieties planted in the same landscape in different locations can bloom consecutively rather than concurrently!

*Iris – A Flower for All Seasons* is used with permission by Leonine Iris ([www.leonineiris.com](http://www.leonineiris.com))

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# The Classifications of Iris

The irises we most often grow as garden plants can be divided into two main types. The two types are **bearded** and **beardless**. (A thick fuzzy "beard" on each of the lower petals or falls identifies bearded irises). The species from which most of our garden hybrids were derived were native to central and southern Europe. The American Iris Society (AIS) has divided the bearded irises into six groups for garden Judging and for awards. They are divided by size and bloom time. If you grow some of each class you can have a wide range of color and a long bloom period., even if you grow only bearded irises.

## Bearded Iris

**Miniature Dwarf Bearded (MDB)** These are the smallest of the bearded irises, with stems from 2" to a maximum of 8". These tiny irises are very effective in the rock garden. They are the first of the bearded irises 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 irises.

**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. They should have at least two branches and should have flowers in proportion to their smaller plant size.

**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. Too often BB's are introduced that are out of class as to height and flower size.

**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 irises" because they are well suited for floral arrangements.

**Tall Bearded (TB)** These plants have stalks over 27". They should be well branched and have many buds. This class as well as having a wide range of colors and patterns also displays more often such things as ruffles and lacing.

**Note:** the term "Median" is inclusive of SDB's, IB's, BB's, and MTB's.

**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 iris 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-, OGB, and OGB+ signify whether an Arilbred is one quarter aril, half aril or three quarters aril, respectively.

## Beardless Iris

Mostly native to Asia, Beardless Irises generally bloom after TB's, extending the iris season even longer.

**Spuria (SPU)** 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.

**Siberian (SIB)**, as their name suggests, need cold and wet conditions to perform well. The blooms are mostly blue, violet and white with large falls and smaller standards. They are most attractive in established clumps and generally grow to a height of 2 to 4 feet.

**Japanese (JI)** 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. They bloom about a month after the TBs. Japanese hybridizers have worked with them for over 500 years.

**Louisiana (LA)** are native to the American Gulf Coast; they require soil that is somewhat acid and wet in the spring. The blooms are usually very wide petaled and open, showing brightly colored style-arms and crisp signals.

**Pacific Coast Native (PCI/PCN), or Californicae (CA)**, 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.

**Species** are often overlooked, but can be a great asset to the garden and a wonderful learning experience for the gardener. They cover a very wide range of colors, heights and cultural conditions