

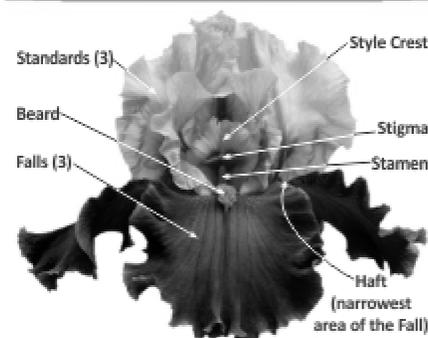
## Maintenance Tips

- Keep weeds and grass tufts out of the rhizome clumps.
- Cultivate shallowly, since the feeder roots are near the surface.
- Established plants benefit from regular watering as this promotes rhizome growth and helps maintain attractive green foliage. However, bearded irises are considered to be drought tolerant, although some water is required if the region is under drought condition.
- Fertilizer should be applied as a side dressing in early spring and then again after bloom. It can burn rhizomes, so apply it around, but not on, the plant or rhizome. Too much nitrogen promotes soft, lush growth which is susceptible to rot, so a 5-10-10, super phosphate or similar low-nitrogen formula is best.
- Air circulation and sanitation are the best problem preventatives.
- Remove old iris leaves and other debris from around the base of the plant.
- Aphids, caterpillars, etc. may damage the flowers, but rarely do serious harm to the plant.
- Slug control is essential. Slugs love to nibble at new shoots and will even climb and attack the tall leaves of some varieties.
- Old bloom stalks need to be cut or broken off at ground level once bloom is complete.
- Healthy, green foliage should NOT be cut off. It needs to be left on the plant

to promote and support development of new sprouts (increases) for the next season.

- Leaf spot may flourish in warm, wet years, making the leaves unsightly. Trimming off the spotted leaves will improve the overall appearance of the plant and retard the spread of disease. (Sanitizing the pruner/scissor blades with a disinfecting wipe when moving from plant to plant will help reduce spreading the disease). As with roses and other perennials, irises can be treated with an insecticide-fungicide spray at regular 10 day to 2 week intervals during the growing season.
- Mulching of bearded iris is to be avoided. If you desire to mulch, do not cover the rhizomes. The sun must reach them to facilitate development of next year's increases. Freezing weather will not harm the rhizomes, other than causing slight "heaving" out of the ground. If this occurs, simply cover the exposed roots with additional soil.

## Bearded Iris Flower Parts



# King County Iris Society

## Bearded Iris

Planting

Dividing

Maintenance



[www.kcis.org](http://www.kcis.org)

## Bearded Iris Classifications

Bearded irises are easily recognizable relative to other irises because of the fuzzy beard found on the flower falls (lower petals).

**MDB:** Miniature Dwarf Bearded (2"-8")

Earliest to bloom, late March to mid-April; excellent for borders or rockeries.

**SDB:** Standard Dwarf Bearded (8"-16")

Bloom in April; great for borders. Wide range of colors and patterns.

**IB:** Intermediate Bearded (16"-27 ½")

Bloom mid-April into May; ideal for mixed perennial beds.

**MTB:** Miniature Tall Bearded (16"-27 ½")

Bloom mid-April through May; great cut flowers due to slender stem.

**BB:** Border Bearded (16"-27 ½")

May is the main bloom period; excellent for mixed perennial beds. Wide range of colors and fancy attributes.

**TB:** Tall Bearded (27 ½" and higher)

May is the main bloom period; excellent as focal point. Widest range of colors, patterns and fancy features.

**AR/AB:** Aril/Arilbred

Aril irises are native to desert climates and need special care in our area.

Arilbred irises are hybrids between arils and other bearded irises and perform well in dry areas.

## Planting preparation

Prepare a neutral to slightly alkaline soil bed at least 10" deep; mixing in a 5-10-10 or balanced fertilizer is recommended at this time. Ideally, the soil needs to be firmly packed down yet crumbly for ease of cultivation.

## Planting

In the Pacific Northwest, the general rule of thumb is to plant the rhizome so that it is partially exposed (like a duck on water). For rhizomes that have long roots, it is easiest to dig your planting hole, build a mound of soil (peak level with planting bed soil level) in the center of the hole, place the rhizome on top of the mound, spread the roots over the mound and then fill soil around the roots, packing it firmly as you go. *Newly-set plants should be kept moist until the roots are growing well.* Note: freezing weather may cause "heaving" of the soil. Simply press the rhizome back in to soil level.

## Spacing

Typical spacing for Standard Dwarf Bearded irises (SDB) is 12", while 2' intervals is typical for Tall Bearded (TB). In regards to individual plants, the closer the plants are, the sooner dividing will be required (3-4 years) and heavier fertilizer will be needed. Greater distance between plants will mean more time before dividing is needed (4-6 years) but the bloom impact will not be as significant for at least 2-3 years. If you are planting for mass impact (3 or more rhizomes; triangular planting pattern), the same considerations will apply, but chances are that division will be needed sooner.

Until the plant is well established, extra care may be necessary. If a bloom stalk is produced the first year, you may want to consider removing it so the energy will be directed to growing strong roots and increases for the following year. If the plant is healthy and well established, and you decide to keep the bloom stalk, staking the

stalk is highly recommended to help prevent the weight of the bloom from uprooting the rhizome if it falls over. Please keep in mind that allowing bloom the first year may lead to bloom-out, where the rhizome and plant are so taxed that they die or fail to perform well for several years.

## Dividing

The most common questions about bearded irises are when and how to divide. In the Pacific Northwest, dividing of bearded irises can be done any time of year as long as the ground can be easily worked. However, the **best** time to divide is from mid-July to the end of August. This timeframe provides the best conditions for the plant develop a healthy root system before cold weather sets in. When dividing, dig the plant, remove and *discard* the old center rhizomes and replant the new fans. If the clump is getting crowded, but you don't want to dig and divide yet, you may cut out the old centers with a knife while they are in the ground. If you choose to follow this procedure, be sure to sterilize the wounds with a 5% bleach solution or a Clorox wipe and allow them to dry before soil covers the remaining rhizome.

**Note:** *The information we have provided here is based on typical environments in the Pacific Northwest. However, the PNW is known for having many microclimates. Each microclimate may affect growth and bloom habits differently.*

Please visit our website for additional information or to contact us with any questions you may have!