

# Handbook For Judges and Show Officials

## Ch 17 Siberian Iris



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Note: This chapter and others from the *Handbook for Judges* are available online. It is recommended that judges and other readers wade through the Introduction and Table of Contents in the full version of the *Handbook* in order to know the full list of available resources, e.g., Glossary, essays, Judge's Activity Record, etc.

## Chapter 17

### SIBERIAN IRIS

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**Definition:** Siberian iris comprise that group of beardless iris consisting of two subseries: Sibiricae with 28 chromosomes and Chrysographes with 40 chromosomes. There are three species in the Sibiricae subseries: *Iris sibirica*, *I. sanguinea*, and *I. typhifolia*. Subseries Chrysographes presently includes eight species: *Iris bulleyana*, *I. clarkei*, *I. chrysographes*, *I. delavayi*, *I. dykesii*, *I. forrestii*, *I. ramsayi*, and *I. wilsonii*. All are native to central Europe and Asia. They vary in height from 7 to 48 inches (18 to 120 cm) and in many other characteristics, such as flower form and foliage.

Hybrid cultivars exist among the species of each subseries, as well as one authenticated inter-subseries hybrid, 'Foretell.' There are tetraploid forms of both subseries. The tetraploid hybrids tend to differ somewhat from the diploids in such aspects as the size and substance of flowers, length of flower stalk, and width of foliage, but the judging standards remain the same.

### GARDEN JUDGING

#### Introduced Varieties of Siberian Iris

Only when an iris has been seen growing and flowering well in a variety of locations should the judge consider it for an Award of Merit (AM) or Special Medal award. Consistency of performance is critical. An award of Honorable Mention (HM) might be appropriate if a cultivar possesses an outstanding new feature, even with significant faults, but no higher award should be given unless the overall quality is superior.

Point scales for garden judging are used to encourage consistent evaluation of specimens. Swift and quality performance is demanded of the judge, making it impractical to point score every iris. The point scale is useful to the student judge in learning the special requirements of the class. Consistency must be observed in judging all classes.

## SCALE OF POINTS

### Garden Judging of Introduced Siberian Iris

1. Distinctiveness & Garden Impact			25
2. Plant			45
	a. Vigor & Disease Resistance	15	
	b. Stalk, Buds, Branching & Length of Bloom	15	
	c. Foliage	15	
3. Flower			30
	a. Form, Proportion & Substance	10	
	b. Colors, Patterns, Contrasts & Textures	10	
	c. Durability	10	
TOTAL			100

#### 1. Distinctiveness & Garden Impact - 25 points

Distinctiveness and personality mean the overall combination of positive features of the iris that distinguish it from its peers and make it readily recognizable. A superior Siberian iris should be attractive both in and out of bloom, vigorous, disease free, and, when in bloom, should provide a glorious bouquet of attractive flowers with a distinct personality. Such a plant is invaluable, both as an accent point in the garden and as a harmonious member of a mixed plant grouping. It is critical to look for this essential whole, both from a distance, and again closer up, before considering the individual features described below.

#### 2. Plant - 45 points

**a. Vigor & Disease Resistance** (15 points). The judge should not focus so intently on the flower alone that the critical features of vigor and growth habit are overlooked. Vigor is critical for a good garden impact with an abundance of flowers and reliable performance. Awarding iris that have attractive flowers, but serious problems with vigor or disease susceptibility will lead, over time, to an overall decline in the garden-worthiness of Siberians. Susceptibility to disease is a very serious fault. An iris which often shows evidence of disease should not be introduced and should not receive any award, whatever its other virtues may be.

**b. Stalk, Buds, Branching, & Length of Bloom** (15 points). Stalks should be upright and resistant to wind and weather. No Siberian stalk should ever need staking.

When properly placed, a higher number of branches and buds is desirable, since it increases the floral display and extends the bloom season. However, judgment is needed here, since some unbranched cultivars, or ones with low bud count, present a succession of bloom stalks which can be equally effective in extending the bloom season. The judge should look for this succession. Generally, bloom on an established plant should last over two weeks, and three or four weeks is possible. Length of bloom period depends on the daily temperature and will be shorter under hot conditions. Although long bloom is desirable, the extended bloom should have significant garden impact. An additional week of flowering that is weak and sporadic has limited value.

Some Siberians send up a second crop of bloom stalks a few weeks after the first. This is termed 'repeat bloom.' If reliable, and the repeat display is sufficient to provide a notable garden effect, then this is a very desirable trait. However, judges will not see this trait unless they revisit gardens some weeks after the spring bloom season or grow these varieties for themselves.

Typically, two branches plus a terminal are the maximum found. A third branch occurs quite rarely. Many named varieties have no branch. The ideal branching presents the flowers close to the stem but without crowding. Wide, candelabra-style branching can cause interference with other flowers in the clump. Stalks should be long enough that the flowers are presented at or above the foliage. It is a fault for the foliage to interfere with the ability to view the flowers clearly.

Multiple buds in the flower socket are generally desirable. Two or three is the most common number, but some Siberian iris may have as many as five or six buds in the terminal. The final flowers in this case may be rather small. An undesirable effect which obscures the clarity of flower form is a tendency in some varieties to open a second flower before the first in the terminal has withered. If this happens frequently, it is a fault.

The relative sizes of the flower and the stalk should be in balance. Large flowers on very short stalks can look ungainly. By contrast, tall stalks may carry smaller flowers in a pleasing way when the stalks are slender and present the flowers gracefully above the foliage.

A feature of some Siberians is the presence of red or purple spathe valves (flower sheaths). These give a colorful and attractive effect before the flowers open and should be noted.

**c. Foliage** (15 points). Siberian foliage varies from very narrow less than half an inch (a few millimeters) to quite broad about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch (2 cm). Foliage colors may vary from light green to dark green to blue-green. Foliage should be upright and spear-like or gracefully curved in a fountain effect. Some species have an interesting spiral twist in the leaf. There is room for variations in foliage appearance, but any marked tendencies to untidiness or disease should be seriously faulted. A Siberian iris with good foliage will provide a valuable landscape effect from spring to frost. A tendency for the foliage to collapse in the late summer exists in some Siberians and is a significant fault, but this cannot be judged if the cultivar is viewed only during the bloom season.

As the clumps of some cultivars expand, they tend to grow with an outer ring of foliage and a hollow center. If this occurs within the first two or three years after planting or to an extreme degree, it is a significant fault because it detracts from the clump effect.

### 3. Flower - 30 points

**a. Form, Proportion and Substance** (10 points). There is no preferred size or form for a Siberian flower. Many different and interesting forms exist and new ones should be encouraged. The only absolute criteria are that Siberian flowers should always be graceful, reasonably balanced in relationship of their parts, symmetrical, and with good clarity of outline. New forms that may meet these criteria include Siberians in which the standards are converted to falls (6-fall types) multi-petal forms in which the reproductive parts are converted to petaloids, and a hose-in-hose structure may be present. The hose-in-hose structure might resemble a flower within a flower.

Both standards and falls may be held horizontally or assume a more vertical orientation and may vary considerably in size. Style arms may lie horizontally or be held more vertically also. When all parts are horizontal, the flatter flower will have less impact when viewed from the side, but a greater impact when viewed from overhead. If too extreme, this form may reduce the clump impact from a distance. Vertical standards and falls produce a three-dimensional appearance. Style arms can play a significant role in the impact of the flower through color contrasts with the falls, feathered midribs, terminal crests or multi-shaded effects.

Multiple Siberian flower forms are acceptable unless there are gross differences in size or visual impact between the flower parts or the flower parts are distorted. One form that lacks grace is the flower with narrow, strappy falls that either hang down or, worse, are held out horizontally with wooden stiffness. Another unacceptable form is the flower

with falls that are twisted or pinched at the haft in such a way as to destroy the flower's outline. Yet another serious problem of form occurs when some parts of the flower lack substance. The result of poor substance is that the standards or falls fail to hold a distinct form and may even flop down irregularly. It is important to note that substance and thickness are not identical. Many Siberians have thin, flexible petals that move attractively with the breeze yet return to their original form when the wind dies. If such flowers hold their form well, they do not lack substance. Very heavy substance is not particularly attractive if it produces wooden stiffness in a flower. As always, there is a balance here between extremes.

Ruffling brings variation in form. It lends individuality to a flower that might otherwise be uninteresting. However, ruffling can be too extreme if it seriously obscures the clarity of outline of the flower. Although such adornments as ruffling, lacing and feathering of the flower parts can be positive attributes, a simple tailored form has a classic grace that should not be downgraded by the judge.

**b. Colors, patterns, Contrasts & Textures** (10 points). Color in Siberian iris currently includes all shades of blue-violet, blue, purple, near black, lavender, pink, yellow, brown, gold, shades of red and pure or creamy whites. Colors vary from soft to brilliant and should always be pleasing. Improvements in existing colors and color blends, particularly, the development of new ones, deserve favorable notice. Though color is important, high awards should not be given to iris based solely on color advances if they exhibit serious faults in other areas.

Color patterns may include dappling, veining, dotting, lighter colored rims on the falls, and combinations of colors and shades. Bitones and bicolors are appearing more frequently, and this often adds interest and individuality to the flower. Increasingly, Siberians are being introduced that have a pleasing blend of colors on the falls and/or standards. If attractive, these contrasts and patterns are to be encouraged. Color patterns, blends and contrasts are only a fault if they combine to provide a muddy effect or the colors clash inharmoniously.

Many Siberians have distinct white or yellow signal areas at the base of the falls, sometimes extending over a considerable area. These can add greatly to the personality of the flower.

Texture is a surface characteristic which influences color impact as it reflects or absorbs light. Texture variations include silky, satiny, velvety, suede-like, or diamond-dusted effects. These characteristics often increase the impact and interest of the flower.

As with ruffling, the various textures, signal areas, patterns and contrasts within the flower coloring can lend strong individuality and interest to a flower. However, a perfect self, entirely lacking marking, signals and contrasts, deserves strong consideration from the judge if it has good garden impact and individuality due to an unusual purity or novelty of color.

**c. Durability (10 points).** Durability is the ability of the flower to remain attractive over several days. This includes natural longevity of the flower before it dies, which is quite dependent on temperature. Under average temperature conditions, it is expected that a Siberian flower will remain attractive for three days. A second aspect of durability is the capacity to withstand adverse weather conditions such as rain and wind or bright sun. One can only judge this quality by growing and observing the variety in the garden under varying conditions. Some fading of colors typically occurs under hot, sunny conditions. This is a fault only if the fading provides an unattractive clump effect.

The durability of flowers can be too great in the sense that a good Siberian iris rapidly casts the old and withered flowers. If these tend to persist obtrusively in the stalk, the effect is likely to be untidy and the iris should be faulted.

## EXHIBITION JUDGING

### Horticultural Entries of Siberian Iris

Exhibition judging of iris is distinctly different from judging in the garden. On the show bench a judge is not trying to determine the qualities and attributes of a particular variety. Rather, the exhibition judge must pass judgement in two areas:

1. Cultural perfection - how well the specimen has been grown by comparing it to the maximum typical performance of the variety being judged.
2. Condition and grooming - how well the specimen was prepared for entry into the exhibition.

Exhibition judging evaluates the specimen as it is shown at the moment the judge sees it.



**SCALE OF POINTS**  
**Exhibition Judging of Horticultural Siberian Iris**

1. Cultural Perfection					75
	a. Stalk			35	
		i. Proportion of Flower to Stalk	10		
		ii. Branching	10		
		iii. Spathes, Bracts & Stem	10		
		iv. Size & Color of Stem & Foliage	5		
	b. Flower			40	
		i. Floral Display	10		
		ii. Form, Proportion & Substance	10		
		iii. Patterns & Texture	10		
		iv. Color	10		
2. Condition & Grooming					25
TOTAL					100

**2. Condition & Grooming - 25 points**

The skills of the exhibitor are evaluated here. The exhibit should reflect visible improvement in the flower and stem resulting from the exhibitor's grooming. This includes neat removal of diseased or damaged foliage; cleanliness of the stem and flower; absence of insect infestations; firm upright positioning of the specimen; facing of the specimen; and a neat removal of spent blossoms, including the ovaries, with no damage to the spathes. The result should be a specimen being presented in its best possible appearance.

A judge may encounter trickery such as pinning or taping of flower parts, flower replacement from another stem, splicing of stems, unattached leaves or leaf spathes, cracking of stems to make them appear straighter, or hidden supports and wedges. If any such alterations are found, the entry is to be disqualified from competition.

## EXHIBITION JUDGING

### Siberian Iris Seedlings

In judging seedling classes, judges should remember that they are not seeking a superior horticultural specimen as defined in horticultural judging. Rather, they are judging a new cultivar which not only conforms to the guidelines for the class, but exhibits desirable qualities comprising improvement and/or innovation. Condition is not a factor in judging seedlings. In fact, it is preferable that the stalks are not groomed, so that the judge can more easily evaluate such features as branching and bud count. Spent flowers can be removed if done so that the ovary remains visible.

The Exhibition Certificate (EC) is awarded to the Best Seedling if one is chosen. The certificate is not a recommendation for introduction since on the show bench it is not possible to evaluate plant qualities. The Best Seedling Award should not be given if no entry is worthy. Exhibition Certificates are also awarded to seedlings that receive votes from at least five judges on special seedling ballots in a calendar year at AIS approved shows. Judges visiting a show are urged to review the seedling entries and use these ballots to reward excellence where they find it.