

CHAPTER 6

TALL BEARDED IRISES

Definition: Bearded irises 71 cm and above (over 27 1/2") in height with branched stalks and typically blooming later than most of the smaller bearded irises.

GARDEN JUDGING

INTRODUCED VARIETIES AND SEEDLINGS

Garden judging of tall bearded irises is based totally on performance in the garden. A well trained judge can immediately recognize a quality cultivar and should never reward varieties with glaring deficiencies.

Competent evaluation of any tall bearded variety demands that the clump be observed over two consecutive bloom seasons. Evaluation of first year plants results in incomplete data. Inferior rhizomes do not produce mature plants the first season of bloom, while those plants with excessive growth habits provide good bloom only on one year clumps.

The ultimate objective for the judge is to seek and cast votes for those varieties of exceptional quality that will consistently perform for consecutive seasons with little pampering.

The judge must make every effort to eliminate any ideas or opinions that reflect personal preferences.

It is vital that the judge be properly informed about irises, enabling him/her to recognize good qualities as well as the inferior. Good garden judges are developed from years of experience in growing irises and evaluating them. If the collection and growing process ceases for the judge, he/she cannot adequately meet the qualifications for an accredited AIS judge.

A scale of points has been established to assist the judge in evaluating an entire iris plant as it grows in the garden. One must evaluate the growing plant step by careful step a number of times during every bloom season.

SCALE OF POINTS

1. Plant	30
a. Foliage	10
b. Durability/Perennial Qualities	15
c. Floriferousness	5
2. Stalk	35
a. Proportion	5
b. Strength	10
c. Branching	5
d. Bud Count and Bloom Sequence	15
3. Flower	25
a. Color	5
b. Form	10
c. Substance and Durability	10
4. Distinctiveness	$\frac{10}{100}$

PLANT - 30 points

a. **Foliage** (10 points). No plant is worthy of consideration if its foliage is floppy, narrow or sparse. Each leaf should be crisp, erect and of sufficient width. The foliage should not display excessive discoloration or leaf spot if neighboring varieties appear vibrant and healthy. It is the foliage which remains during the entire growing season, and the judge is particularly admonished to search out those varieties which maintain foliage of exceptional quality. Skimpy or floppy foliage will require that the variety be penalized the full ten points.

b. **Durability/Perennial Qualities** (15 points). An iris variety should perform dependably as a clump for three consecutive bloom seasons. Only the serious iris fancier is willing to replant more frequently.

The plant should sparkle with vigor and good health. It should thrive under good cultural conditions, but it must not demand pampering. A tall bearded iris variety should produce between 3 and 5 increases per rhizome per year. If it does not, it should lose most of the 15 points.

How well does the variety perform in spite of temperature extremes? Colder climates are disastrous for some varieties, while others might brown and shrivel in intense summer heat. A hardy perennial must never be a temperamental one.

Under adverse conditions, irises can develop problems. Good drainage is an absolute requirement for tall bearded culture. By comparing surrounding varieties grown under similar cultural conditions, one can determine if the variety should be penalized. Obvious susceptibility to disease is cause for disqualifying the variety from any consideration for awards.

c. **Floriferousness** (5 points). How many days does the variety provide abundant bloom? A variety must remain in bloom over two weeks to receive credit for floriferousness. This trait cannot be judged by a single garden visit but requires observation over two bloom seasons. The plant must produce sufficient quantity of bloom to assure that the clump does not appear sparse. Adequate increase should also remain after bloom to produce bloom the following season.

The ratio of stalks to the number of fans must be at least 25%. Fewer stalks will result in plants seriously lacking in color display. Should the ratio exceed 75%, flowers will become crowded and few plants will remain, resulting in "bloom out."

STALK - 35 Points

a. **Proportion** (5 points). No arbitrary formula can be used to determine good proportion. Taller and thicker stalks with wide branching are required to display large flowers properly, while those varieties with smaller blossoms are best when displayed on smaller stalks with less dramatic branching. The stalk must hold the flowers well above the foliage but must not suspend them awkwardly at excessive heights.

b. **Strength** (10 points). Of what value is an iris flower if its stalk will not support it? It is often difficult to evaluate the stalk's strength fairly on a first year plant, as its root system may not anchor it sufficiently. Do not expect an iris stalk to survive flood, hail or high winds. In all cases the stalk should remain fully upright unless there has been severe weather. Staking is obvious proof of a weak stalk, so penalize the variety the full ten points.

c. **Branching** (5 points). It is the branching that displays the individual flowers, holding each one so that it does not interfere with another. Wide candelabrum branching is very attractive on a one year plant with one or two stalks. However, it is rarely preferred on irises growing as a clump because it creates interference between flowers on adjacent stalks.

Modified candelabrum type branching is usually best in the garden. The stalk must have at least two branches plus the terminal, pleasingly and evenly arranged on the upper two-thirds of the stalk. If properly positioned, an additional branch on the stalk is ideal. The single bud which often appears just below the terminal bud socket is not to be considered a branch; it is very desirable as long as its flower is not crowded.

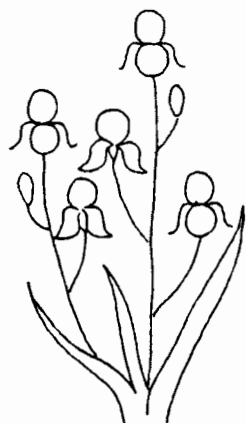
Poor branching is evidenced in many ways. Branches that "toe in" can distort flower form by holding the blossoms too tightly against the stalk. Excessively long branches may display flowers at approximately the same level, creating an unpleasant effect. Sometimes branches are spaced over the upper one-



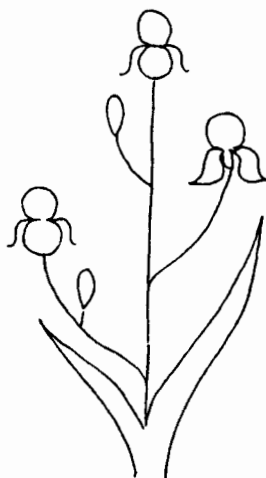
2 branches & spur



high branching
"Bunched"



secondary bloom stalk



wide candelabra



short

TYPES OF BRANCHING

third of the stalk, resulting in unbalanced top branching, severely reducing the probability that the stalk will remain erect.

d. **Bud Count and Bloom Sequence** (15 points). This deficiency in tall bearded irises is widely and justly criticized. A variety must remain in bloom over two weeks or it should receive few points. The number of buds can be determined easily by observation. If the total is fewer than seven, no points can be given, and the variety should be seen growing again for further evaluation.

The sequence of bloom is as critical as bud count. Ideally, the terminal socket (at the tip of the stalk) and those of each branch should contain at least three buds that will produce full sized flowers in an extended time sequence. A stalk which consistently opens three or more blooms at once almost never meets the 14-day minimum requirement for bloom, and such a stalk in a clump usually results in crowding of the flowers.

A variety which displays not more than two open flowers at once not only prevents crowding in the clump but greatly extends the season of bloom. Some tall bearded varieties produce additional stalks after the initial bloomstalk, extending the season significantly. There is no preference for stalks which open three or more flowers at once, as the critical need in the garden is to extend the bloom season.

FLOWER - 25 Points

a. **Color** (5 points). It is color which attracts us. The iris flower itself is large, and the single blossom should be individually attractive.

The flower must be free from any colors which strike a discordant note. Muddy, dull colors cannot be brilliant, delicate or rich and are lacking in good color clarity. Blended colors can create difficulty for the judge. They should produce a bright and pleasing appearance as opposed to the dull and drab.

In amoenas, bicolors, bitones and variegatas either sharp or subtle contrast is acceptable, but it is important that the colors create harmony.

Plicata patterns should be distinct and not appear as stains. In plicatas with standards and falls of a nearly solid color pattern, the ground color is almost obscured; in others, the ground color shines brightly.

The color of the beard can contribute significantly to the beauty and brightness of the flower. Beard colors can match the flower or a sharp contrast between the two can result in striking garden subjects. A "fat" beard of generous proportion is usually preferred to a straggly, sparse one.

A new color, if pleasing, is an asset and should receive favorable ratings from judges. An iris must always be judged on its total garden qualities. Color alone is insufficient justification for an award.

Color that fades rapidly or in an unpleasing series of variations is unacceptable. A flower that fades before maintaining three days of pleasing appearance should be heavily penalized.

Haft colorings must be judged on the basis of whether they add to or detract from the appearance of the flower. "Rough" is a term which usually describes unpleasant color application, although intense haft colorings can be quite attractive. Sometimes these vein colorations do not extend far enough down the falls to be conspicuous, and these hafts are said to be "smooth."

b. **Form** (10 points). Flower form has made tremendous advancements in recent years. Variability in form is acceptable as long as the standards and falls meet minimum requirements, producing flowers of good balance and proportion. Varieties which normally produce a beard projection (i.e., horns, spoons) are totally acceptable and should be evaluated accordingly. (Refer to "Judging Space Age Irises.")



**narrow haft
tucked falls**



**hanging, narrow,
pinched falls**



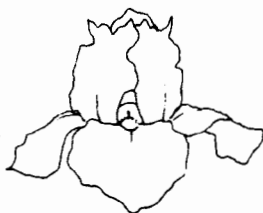
narrow falls



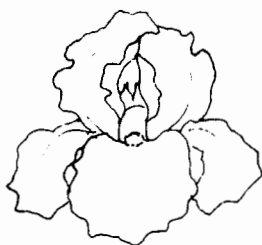
open standards



wide, flaring falls



conical standards



domed standards

FLOWER FORM

The standards may be erect or domed, open or closed, touching or overlapping. "Domed" standards are rounded with the petal tips either touching or slightly overlapping, while "erect" describes those standards which remain upright and do not necessarily touch at the top. In all cases, the standards must be held firmly in position.

Strong midribs are vital assets to form and are an absolute necessity if the standards are erect and open, lest wind and rain distort the bloom quickly. Touching, closed or overlapping standards often provide self-bracing, adding strength and the ability to withstand the elements. The contour of each standard on a particular bloom should always be identical.

The falls should be large enough in relation to the standards to produce good balance, but not so large that they dominate the standards and destroy proportion. Variability of shape is inevitable, appearing as rounded, oval or triangular. A fall is considered to be "pinched" when the sides appear to have been squeezed. Pinching is considered inferior even if heavy ruffling attempts to conceal it.

Broad falls are more effective as an area for display of color than the more narrow ones. Rounded falls are highly regarded, but if the shape approaches a circular form, it should be ruffled. Narrow, rectangular or strappy falls are not acceptable. Wide and overlapping falls are much acclaimed, and the judge should be ever watchful for narrowness of hafts, strappiness of the falls or falls which appear to have been "pinched."

The position of the falls can be flaring, hanging or tucked. As in the standards, a strong midrib is all important. Flaring falls are preferred to those that hang excessively, and the degree of flare is closely related to stalk height. A short plant may have flowers with horizontally flaring falls since they are observed from above, but such flaring would not be as effective on a tall plant. If the falls hang vertically without swirl or lilt, this detracts from the flower and should be penalized in relation to the degree that the falls hang. If the tip of the falls tuck under, this

is a serious fault (not to be confused with the "recurving" of arils and arilbreds).

The haft is that portion of the fall where it connects to the body of the flower, and a narrow haft is detrimental to the appearance of the flower.

The shape, structure and position of the flower's petals and the quality of substance present determine form. If balance, proportion, garden value or attractiveness are adversely affected by form, the flower should receive no points.

c. **Substance and Durability** (10 points). Substance is the inner tissue structure that determines how long the flower can maintain its color and symmetry of form.

Petals with poor substance cannot possibly maintain their shape, regardless of weather conditions, and a flower should not tatter and flop after a spring downpour. Compare the clump with others in the same garden. Tall bearded flowers of today should withstand all variations of weather except the extremes.

Substance aids in retention of color. Flowers that develop white spots and "burn" in the sun possess an obvious lack of substance and durability. "Crepey" texture is suspect, as it is usually associated with poor substance. A flower that does not maintain its form and color saturation for at least three days should lose the entire ten points.

DISTINCTIVENESS - 10 Points

An iris deserving of awards should have individual appeal and personal charm. It should possess individuality and exhibit unique qualities which draw the observer from across the garden.

To deserve an award, a variety should be distinctive enough to be recognized in any garden if the label were removed. An

iris may have every asset previously discussed, but if it lacks personality or charm, it will be of little value in the garden. Distinctiveness accounts for only ten points and awards should not be given to a variety simply because of its individuality, but awards must always be based on the total iris -- plant, stalk and flower.

SUMMARY

Consider the entire plant as you approach it. Observe the plant at a distance of 3.7 to 4.6 meters (4 or 5 yards) to determine if all parts combine to present a well proportioned plant with superior landscape value.

Two primary areas that demand special attention are length of bloom season and the iris foliage as it appears throughout the growing season. The ability to rebloom dependably should also be rewarded when the quality of the flower is acceptable.

Fragrance is subjective. What smells heavenly to one individual may be offensive to another. If the judge detects a pleasing fragrance, rejoice! Remember, what is objectionable to one may be pleasing to another.

Texture is a surface characteristic of the petals that is difficult to evaluate. It plays a significant part in perception of color by the judge, but to declare that one texture is superior to another is presumptuous. Any texture (whether leathery, satiny, silky, velvety or waxy) is acceptable if it is visually pleasing.

Arrive at your composite judgment of the entire iris as a garden plant. Do not be influenced by the opinions of others. Casting a vote for an iris is your endorsement for introduction and higher awards. Be certain to evaluate the plant over two bloom seasons before determining its qualities. Grow whatever varieties you wish, but cast ballots only for those varieties which clearly excel in all areas.