

## IRIS - THE RAINBOW IN YOUR GARDEN

Ali Dyche & Diane Threlkeld

The Iris, Greek for rainbow, is one of the easiest perennials to grow. Irises generally fall into bearded, aril and beardless categories. Some types to choose from that grow well here include Siberian, Dutch, Winter and Bearded. The bearded Iris, so named for the thick bushy "beards" on the lower petals of the blossoms, grows from rhizomes and is the most common type grown in temperate climates of the western U.S. We shall focus on them here.

Notable qualities of Irises are the color selection, size and hardiness. Bearded Iris is available in almost all the colors of the rainbow. Sizes range from small to intermediate to the tall statuesque beauties – all the better to design your garden around!

Most folks are familiar with the beauty and versatility of including Irises in your landscape. I assumed that such grandeur came at a high price in regards to upkeep. I was pleasantly surprised at what I learned!

- Plant Irises from July to September. This is also the best time to divide and replant overcrowded Irises. Plant no later than 4-6 weeks before the first hard freeze. Irises need at least six hours of sunshine, good soil drainage and air circulation.
- Newly planted rhizomes (the Iris' thick fleshy root) need moisture to foster root development. Once established, Irises can get by with minimal watering (except during dry spells). Avoid overwatering; it is a common mistake with Irises.
- Keep Iris beds weed free to allow for air circulation. After blossoms die back, cut off bloom stems close to the ground. Remove diseased or dying leaves immediately. In late fall or early winter, cut healthy leaves back to about 6 inches.
- Every 3-4 years, Irises become overcrowded and blossom production will decline. Remove the entire clump and break off any old or soft rhizomes. Divide remaining rhizomes and replant only the strongest. Weed, mulch and water after planting.

Check out Sunset's [Western Garden Book](#), Mary Robson's [Month-by-Month Gardening in Washington & Oregon](#), the American Iris Society at [www.irises.org/](http://www.irises.org/) and Schreiner's Iris Gardens at <http://schreinersgardens.com> for more information. Whichever species, colors or sizes of Iris you choose, your garden will look stunning with them in it!