

CHAPTER 13

NOVELTY BEARDED IRISES

Novelty bearded irises are becoming more popular as the quality of the plant and flower improves. More iris hybridizers are participating in the development of these irises and keeping them when they appear unexpectedly in the seedling rows. The role of the iris judge is to intelligently pass judgment on them with serious evaluation techniques rather than to merely dismiss them as being abnormal.

GARDEN JUDGING

INTRODUCED CULTIVARS AND SEEDLINGS

The rule of thumb is: The better the flower, the better the novelty. While a novelty iris flower may not look exactly like the norm, it should still be a beautiful flower. The mere existence of unique form is not enough. The appropriate chapter in this *Handbook* should be used for judging novelty irises, but the judge will have to exercise an independent judgment on specific points, particularly form and distinctiveness. Improved and innovative flowers, bud count, stalks and plants are to be stressed as with all garden judging. It is important to note that few of the novelties in flower form or foliage variegation are absolutely consistent but must appear at least 65 percent of the time. Judges should note higher frequencies and consider them accordingly.

Multiple Petaled Flowers. These varieties possess more than three standards and three falls. One should closely ascertain that the flowers, though unique, still exhibit the basic accepted outline of the iris flower.

Random Color Application. The expression of an unstable color gene or other genetic material is thought to produce flowers that exhibit a random application of two or more colors. While the color pattern (streaking, splashing, etc.) should be

fairly consistent from flower to flower, the color markings themselves (streaks, splashes, etc.) are random in applications. In *The World of Iris* this color pattern is called 'broken color' (BC). In bearded irises BC is still often referred to as a novelty, but over time it will probably be accepted as a common pattern as it is in Japanese irises. BC hybridizing in bearded irises is still in its early stages and significant changes in color combinations are likely to occur.

Variable Color Patterning. The diploid MTB 'Joseph's Coat' (Katkamier 1930) is an iris possessing this characteristic. It was registered in 1989 as 'Joseph's Coat Katkamier' (A. Katkamier by E. Tankesley-Clarke). Its usual color pattern varies from white and violet amoena to a yellow and red variegata. In Exhibition judging, a stalk of 'Joseph's Coat' should exhibit both color patterns to be considered. Although the two distinctive patterns appear unique to this iris, the effect is another example of BC and more examples of this characteristic are likely to be produced.

Flat-Shaped Flowers. These flowers are formed by six petals, either all falls with beards or standards and falls neatly laid out in a horizontal to downward arching position. The diploid 'Rhythm' is an example of six falls while 'Flat Rate' is both standards and falls. If the flower is comprised of both standards and falls, the standards must consistently grow flat at least 65% of the time. Weak, floppy standards that collapse do not make a flat flower. The style arms of the flat-shaped flowers will most often appear in the normal quantity, but may appear in multiple or irregular counts. Flat-shaped varieties may have one or two partially normal flowers on a stalk, but this occasional inconsistency is acceptable while total consistency would be a plus.

Variiegated Foliage. In bearded irises, the examples of the most stable variegated foliage (VF) remains the two *I. pallida* clones: *I. pallida variegata*, with its yellow/cream and green foliage; and *I. pallida argentea*, with white and green foliage. Although their unremarkable flowers are almost identical, the *variegata* clump is usually more vigorous and the stalks are about 3-5 inches taller than *argentea*. A number of tetraploid clones with VF have been introduced and although several have fairly consistent VF, none are yet as consistent as the *I. pallida* clones. However, there is often a large improvement in the tetraploid flower form and quality to take into consideration when judging the overall effect. Another improvement could be adding other colors to the foliage such as in the case of a purple base.