IRIS SPECIES & SPEC-X

Garden Judging | Exhibition Judging | Seedling Judging

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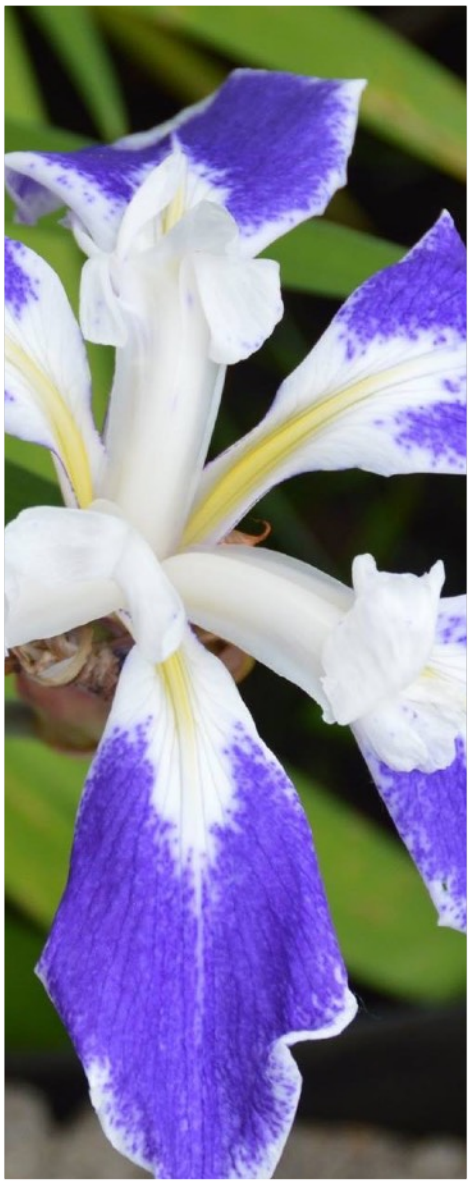

I. laevigata Albopurpurea montrosa
Andi Rivarola

Definition

A species (SPEC) iris is the named selection of a single species originally collected in the wild as a division, seedling, or seed; has come from seeds of the former plants grown in cultivation (whether hand pollinated or open pollinated); or has come from mutations of the above.

Definition

According to SIGNA (Species Iris Group of North America), SPEC-X is the term applied to any hybrid that does not fall into a conventional category such as Louisianas, Siberians, or Junos. It literally means "species cross". The SPEC-X hybrid iris will have a species as a parent or as a close ancestor. For example, 'Holden Clough' is thought to be the offspring of Iris chrysographes and I. pseudacorus because it resembles those species. 'Holden's Child' is the offspring of 'Holden Clough' crossed with itself. Both are registered as SPEC-X because they do not fit into any other conventional category.

The hybridizer may elect to register an iris as a species if it seems the iris is more species-like and not representative of the definition of a specific class. For example, when it is time to register an Iris sibirica seedling, the hybridizer has the option of registering it in the Siberian class or the species class. The Founders of SIGNA Medal is the highest award for iris in the

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species class.

SPEC-X iris are hybrids with a mix of species traits. A cross involving an iris species as one of the parents and another plant not of that species is a SPEC-X. Also included in SPEC-X are hybrids from interspecies crosses. An example of an interspecies cross (SPEC-X) would be the seedling from the cross of Iris ensata with I. pseudacorus. Iris hybrids that do not fit in any other category are also considered SPEC-X iris. Another example would be the offspring of I. junonia and an SDB. The hybridizer may elect to register a seedling as SPEC-X if it is more species-like and does not fit into any other category. The Randolph-Perry Medal is the highest award for iris in the SPEC-X class.

Species (SPEC) and SPEC-X iris are versatile and can be used in the perennial border or rock garden as specimen plants, mass plantings, ground covers, pool plants or container plants. Burgeoning interest in species and SPEC-X iris is bringing more of them into gardens, where their evaluation can pose a complicated assignment. Judges are encouraged to grow the species and SPEC-X iris most commonly grown in their area, because there is no better way to learn about these iris than by growing them.

GARDEN JUDGING

Iris Species and SPEC-X

Species (SPEC) and SPEC-X are the broadest and most diverse classes of iris, representing many sizes, forms, bud counts, branching habits, types of stalks, etc. Guidelines from other classes of iris should be set aside. In SPEC, each cultivar is to be evaluated on its own merit as a garden plant. It is important to remember that a species is not represented by any single plant. Many species have a great deal of variation, even in the wild. SPEC-X is a wide-open class. In some cases, the judge will be evaluating iris of a type which never existed before. There is a lot of leeway in this class to reward innovation. However, the cultivar must also be evaluated on its garden merit.

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. This scale of points can be used to judge any species or SPEC-X iris.

'Do the Math' (Copeland 2008) SPEC-X
Andi Rivarola

SCALE OF POINTS

Garden Judging of Iris Species & SPEC-X

1. Aesthetic Qualities			55
	a. Flower	20	
	b. Foliage	15	
	c. Overall Presentation	20	
2. Cultural Qualities			20
	a. Vigor	10	
	b. Disease & Pest Resistance	5	
	c. Growth Habit	5	
3. Distinctiveness			25
TOTAL			100

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1. Aesthetic Qualities - 55 points

Is it visually pleasing? This is the guideline for the aesthetic qualities of the species and SPEC-X iris. Try to leave preconceptions regarding color, proportion, form, ruffling, branching, etc., behind when judging the aesthetic value of species iris.

a. Flower (20 points). Many elements are involved in evaluating an individual flower. Color and/or pattern are among the easier elements to judge. Features such as beards, signals, crests, etc., also are important, and there are no hard and fast rules as to what is visually pleasing. In one iris a cleaner, more distinct signal may be a very attractive feature, while in another, the total lack of a signal may also be attractive. Even more difficult to evaluate are the shape, texture, finish, substance, and durability of a flower. The shape of each flower must be considered individually. All shapes may be acceptable. However, it must be pleasing for that particular iris. Tucked falls are attractive on some species and SPEC-X iris and not on others. Generally, the natural (wild) shape of a species or SPEC-X iris can be a helpful guide. New shapes can be considered improvements if they are visually pleasing. Double or multi-petaled flowers are acceptable if they enhance overall aesthetic quality. Extra parts should be displayed in multiples of three. Flowers which do not open because of multiplicity of parts are to be discouraged. Substance and durability can be a confusing area, especially for species. While stiffer petals may be an improvement in durability, they may be too stiff to be attractive for that particular specimen if one of its special qualities is daintiness. Individual judgments must be made in each case. Colorful seed pods can be just as attractive as flowers and should be rewarded if present.

b. Foliage (15 points). Consider the aesthetic qualities of the foliage. Start with the typical wild form of that species and look for its best qualities and improvements. The shape of each leaf fan is important, as well as the shape of the whole plant. For example, if the species has typically narrow foliage and a cultivar has even more narrow foliage which enhances its appearance, this is to be rewarded. Color is also important. Bright green foliage may be as visually pleasing as grey-green or dark green, depending on the species. Variegations in the foliage (i.e., different colored zones on the leaves such as stripes or a series of dots) may be a distinct garden asset. Variegations should be consistent, appearing on all of the leaves and not just some of the leaves. If the variegation occurs only for a short period of time, the judge must determine if it is sufficient to be considered a rewardable feature. Leaves stained with purple should not be overlooked; but again, the effect must be pleasing. Also important is the finish of the foliage. Is it shiny or dull, or textured in some special way? Finally, consider the durability of the foliage. Does it hold up well over a long period of time or does it collapse in a heap after bloom? A species or SPEC-X iris which naturally goes dormant after bloom should not be penalized, but one which naturally remains green should be judged on its foliage, both in and out of bloom. An iris grown primarily for its foliage should not have to produce outstanding flowers to receive recognition. In that case, the points will have to be adjusted to accommodate its unusual features.

c. Overall Presentation (20 points). How does it all go together? There are a number of important elements of overall presentation to consider: color harmony, stalk carriage, balance and proportion, carrying power, and floriferousness. Each species and SPEC-X iris must be judged with the typical wild form in mind as the underlying criterion. A specimen which typically blooms down in the foliage should not be penalized for that. But if a cultivar of that species has flowers which are more visible, it should be rewarded. Do not expect the presentation of Iris cristata to compare to I. pseudacorus.

Balance and proportion are difficult areas to judge in species. If you are unfamiliar with arils and more used to Iris pumila, the arils may appear out of proportion. It is important to know the species and SPEC-X iris you are judging. A single small and delicate flower on a tall stalk might be out of balance if there is only one flower open at a time, but if there are many open at once, it might be quite attractive. If stalks are leaning or tilting, they are out of balance.

Garden impact or effectiveness should be judged both at a distance and close at hand, since iris are viewed in both of these ways in the garden. Size is only one aspect of garden impact. A small bright flower may have as much impact as a larger less colorful one. A tiny iris grown in a mass may have as much impact as a single specimen of a much larger iris.

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Floriferousness is an important element of both garden impact and overall presentation. Floriferousness can be achieved through the duration of each bloom, the number of buds per stalk, and/or the number of stalks per plant. Also important in judging floriferousness is repeat bloom which cannot be evaluated on a single visit to a garden. In addition, credit should be given to varieties which are extra early or extra late as they extend the season of bloom in the garden.

2. Cultural Qualities - 20 points

How well does it grow? This is the standard for judging the cultural qualities of species and SPEC-X iris. The genus Iris is widely distributed over many diverse habitats, and some species require exact conditions for growth. If the gardener is unable to provide these conditions, the plant will appear less vigorous, and the plant should not be judged. Those plants which adapt more readily to a wide variety of growing conditions will naturally be considered by more judges, as they will grow well in more gardens. Do not try to judge the cultural qualities of a species or SPEC-X iris on only one visit to a garden or on one season's evaluation. These are aspects which must be judged overtime.

a. Vigor (10 points). Strong growth and good increase. Vigor is often thought to include good health, but in this context, these two qualities have been differentiated. A cultivar may grow and increase very well and yet be very susceptible to a disfiguring disease such as leaf spot or virus.

b. Disease and Pest Resistance (5 points). If a cultivar is not favored by a pest such as iris borer or thrips, while others are, it should receive more points. The same is true for virus, leaf spot, rust, etc. Clearly, any cultivar susceptible to diseases which also affect the vigor of the plant should be seriously penalized.

c. Growth Habit (5 points). If an iris ordinarily grows in a rambling habit, it should not be penalized for conforming to its species type. However, if a named cultivar of such a species or SPEC-X iris has a more clump forming habit, it should be rewarded, because it will be more useful in the garden scene. Similarly, a named cultivar of a clump forming species should be rewarded if it remains solid in the center over time, and penalized if it dies out in the center. Finally, in the SPEC-X class, many varieties may be sterile. While this is viewed as a fault by iris hybridizers, it should not be penalized as a garden plant.

3. Distinctiveness - 25 points

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We should strive to allow and encourage the greatest possible diversity of iris expression. Distinctiveness can only be evaluated by a judge who is familiar with most of the named cultivars of a particular species and SPEC-X iris. A named cultivar should be distinct enough to be recognized without a label. Points in this section should be awarded for any of the elements listed above under aesthetic qualities and cultural qualities if they are especially positive. This section also allows the judge to give special recognition for an innovative feature such as a color break, even though the flower may be somewhat lacking in shape and substance. There is a limit however, to rewarding a single innovative feature if the overall presentation of the plant is poor.

I. sintenisii
Andi Rivarola

EXHIBITION JUDGING

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Horticultural Entries of Iris Species & SPEC-X

Both species and SPEC-X iris may be registered with cultivar names and these names can be found in The American Iris Society check lists, the R&Is, and the AIS Iris Encyclopedia. For species, a valid published binomial (for example, Iris setosa, Iris tectorum, Iris aphylla, etc.) is considered the equivalent of a registered name. Lists of species binomials can be found in SIGNA's (Species Iris Group of North American) Species Check List and Brian Mathew's The Iris. Many species were registered and introduced before the species and SPEC-X classes existed, and these older iris are just as acceptable as exhibition entries as those registered as species and SPEC-X iris.

SHOW ENTRIES

All horticultural specimens should be identified as fully as possible on the entry tag by giving either the registered cultivar name or the species binomial. In addition, the collector or geographical origin, if known, and any additional information, such as a commonly accepted varietal name or a clonal designation assigned by the collector should be included on the entry tag. For example, Iris aphylla H17 (Hanselmayer) identifies the species, the assigned clonal designation, and the collector. "H17" identifies a particular clone, just as a suffix such as "alba" or "nana" does.

Seedling entries should include seedling number, class (SPEC or SPEC·X) and the species binomial name or cross description in order to enable the judge to evaluate the entries in the context of their species origin.

No exhibit should be disallowed because it has been flowered in a cold frame or cold house as opposed to the open garden. Species and SPEC-X iris are often grown under controlled conditions outside their area of normal hardiness.

Many species are too small in scale to fit the containers used for tall bearded iris. The show committee should either provide several types of smaller containers (floral picks in Styrofoam or Oasis work well) or specify that exhibitors provide their own containers of a suitable size.

SHOW SCHEDULE

Nowhere is a good show schedule more important than in providing for species and SPEC-X iris. The show committee will need some knowledge of the various types and should be familiar with what types have been exhibited in the past at each time of year and in what numbers. There can be one or more sections for species and SPEC-X in the show schedule. However, if very few are exhibited, then a single section titled "Species & SPEC-X" is sufficient. Lumping these iris in an "Other Iris" section does not provide them with an appropriate judging venue.

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If the show bench normally has numerous species and SPEC-X entries, then two or more sections should be provided in the show schedule. There are several possible approaches to creating sections and subsections in an iris show. One option is to create a separate section for pure species and another for SPEC-X. Another option is to create separate sections for bearded and beardless species. A semi-botanical approach works well, too. For example, creating sections for beardless water iris, dryland iris, woodland iris, etc. Or sections could be based on region of origin, such as American beardless, European bearded, Asian beardless, etc. If an unusually large number of entries appears at the show, it is the responsibility of the show chair to create additional sections on the spot. For example, a show might have 15 entries that qualify for the "Beardless Species" section, but eight of the entries might be clones of Iris cristata. In this case, it would be desirable to judge the I. cristata clones as a separate section.

'Rubicon' (Lankow 2017) SPEC-X
📷 Andi Rivarola

Grouping of entries within the classes in the exhibition hall should be alphabetically by species or SPEC-X (within any sections or subsections), and alphabetically by varietal designation or registered name within each species or SPEC-X class. In a cultivar show, each different clone may be awarded a first-place ribbon (if deserving). If there are several entries of one registered variety, then they should be judged together and only one first-place ribbon awarded among them. If there are several entries

identified with the same species binomial name and clonal designation, e.g., Iris aphylla H17 (Hanselmayer), then they should be judged together and only one first-place ribbon awarded among them.

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.

A rigidly defined point scale will not work for species and SPEC-X entries because of their great variation. The following guidelines may be useful in assigning relative value when evaluating the iris stalk and/or flower and the condition and grooming of the specimen.

SCALE OF POINTS

Exhibition Judging of Iris Species and SPEC-X

1. Cultural Perfection of Flower & Stalk (if any)	75
2. Condition & Grooming	25
TOTAL	100

1. Cultural Perfection of Flower & Stalk (if any) - 75 points

a. Flower. Characteristics evaluated for flower are color, form, and substance. Form can vary greatly and depends on the species origins of the specimen. In some species the standards are nearly indistinguishable from the falls (e.g., Iris fulva), and in others, nearly absent (e.g., Iris danfordiae, I. setosa). In Junos, the style crests commonly have become so large and ornate that even without the standards, the flower has balance. In others (e.g., Iris paradoxa), the falls may be so much reduced as

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I. laevigata Seiran

to appear as mere landing platforms for pollinators. Thus, floral parts may be in quite different proportion from one iris to another. Some will show petals aligned in a single plane, some will be erect, and some will have pendent petals. No matter which, the arrangement and orientation of petals must conform, both in color and shape, to the published species, clonal or cultivar description. Substance should also be typical of the species or cultivar. In some species, substance is typically thin and in others, it typically is quite tough.

b. Stalk. The stalks of species and SPEC-X iris can be different from those of modern hybrids. Some species lack a stalk. Instead, the flower is held up with a perianth, a floral tube. The stalk or branch habit of a species or SPEC-X iris should not be penalized if it does not conform to what is expected in an advanced generation cultivar. Instead, the stalk and branches should be compared to the norm for its own type. Some of these iris have extensive branching, while a single terminal flower is typical of others. They may have asymmetrical branching, symmetrical branching, or no branching. As for the stalk, it is natural for some to be straight, for some to be twisted, and some almost non-existent. This further points up the necessity for judges to know the characteristics of species and SPEC-X iris grown in their area.

ISBN# 978-1-892400-07-9

2. Condition and Grooming - 25 points

The skills of the exhibitor are evaluated here. The specimen 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

Seedlings of Iris Species & SPEC-X

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.

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Handbook For Judges and Show Officials

Edition 8.0

Note: This chapter and others from the *Handbook for Judges* are available online. It is recommended that judges and other readers check out 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.

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