

Handbook For Judges and Show Officials

Ch 7 TB 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 check 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 7

TALL BEARDED IRIS

Approved by the AIS Board of Directors, March 30, 2021

Definition: Bearded iris taller than 27.5 inches (taller than 70 cm) in height with branched stalks and typically blooming later than most of the smaller bearded iris.

GARDEN JUDGING:

Introduced Tall Bearded Iris Varieties & Seedlings

Garden judging of tall bearded iris 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. The judge must evaluate the growing plant a number of times during every bloom season.

It is vital that the judge be properly informed about iris in order to recognize good qualities as well as the inferior. Good garden judges develop after years of experience of growing iris and evaluating them.

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 Tall Bearded Iris

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 & Bloom Sequence	15	
3. Flower			25
	a. Color	5	
	b. Form	10	
	c. Substance & Durability	10	
4. Distinctiveness			10
TOTAL			100

1. 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 should 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 (15 points). An iris variety should perform dependably as a clump for three consecutive bloom seasons. Only the serious iris fancier will be willing to replant more frequently.

The plant should display 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 10 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, iris 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.

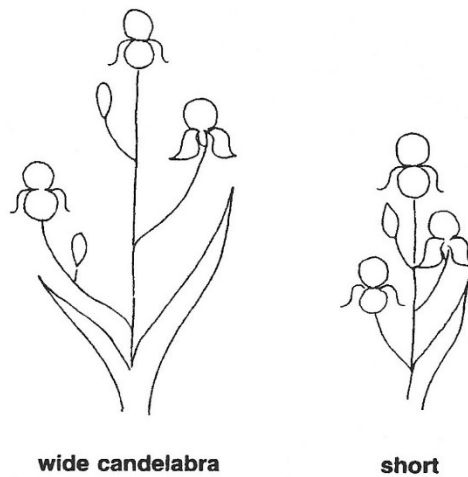
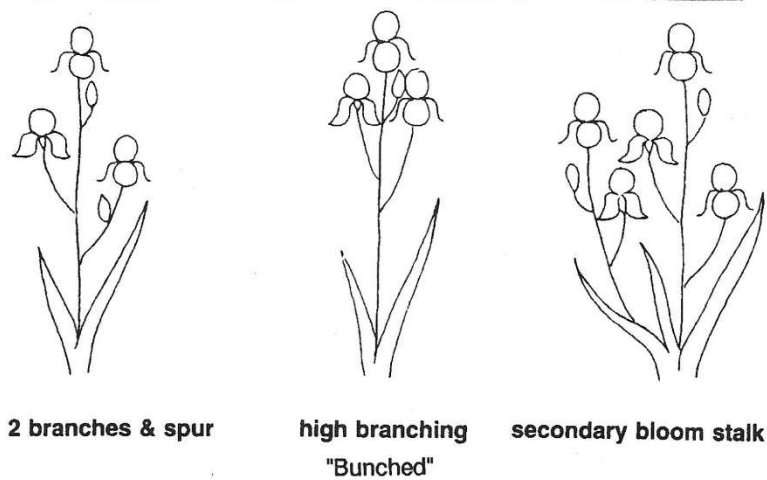
c. Floriferousness (5 points). How many days does the variety provide abundant bloom? A variety must remain in bloom over two weeks to receive credit for floriferousness. This trait cannot be judged by a single garden visit but requires observation over two bloom seasons. The plant must produce a sufficient 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.” For example, if the iris clump has 20 fans, the ideal number of bloom stalks would be between 5 and 15.

2. 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 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. Unless there has been severe weather, the stalk should remain fully upright. Staking is obvious proof of a weak stalk, so penalize that variety the full ten points.



TYPES OF BRANCHING

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 candelabra branching is very attractive on a one-year plant with one or two stalks. However, it is rarely preferred on iris 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 (referred to as a spur) which often

appears just below the terminal bud socket is not to be considered a branch. However, the spur 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 might display flowers at approximately the same level, creating an unpleasant effect. Sometimes branches are spaced over the upper one-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 iris 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, fewer points should 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 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. Such a stalk in a clump usually results in crowding of the flowers.

A variety which displays two or fewer open flowers at once prevents crowding in the clump. Flowers that open singularly on the stalk will extend the season of bloom. Some tall bearded varieties produce additional stalks after the initial bloom stalk, which will extend the bloom season significantly. There is no preference for stalks which open three or more flowers at once. The critical need in the garden is to extend the bloom season.

3. Flower – 25 points

a. Color (5 points). It is the color which attracts us. The iris flower itself is large and the single blooms 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, bi-colors, bi-tones, 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 can almost be 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. A beard with a sharp color in contrast to the petals can result in a striking garden subject. 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.

Colors that fade 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.

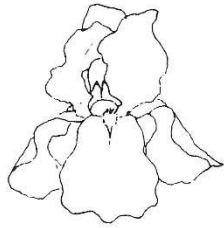
b. Form (10 points). Flower form has made tremendous advancements in recent years. Variability in form is acceptable as long as the standards and falls meet minimum requirements, producing flowers of good balance and proportion. Varieties which normally produce a beard projection (e.g., horns, spoons)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

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.

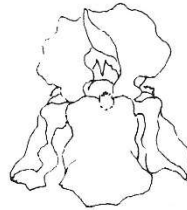
Strong midribs are vital assets to form and are an absolute necessity if the standards are erect and open, lest wind and rain distort the bloom quickly. Touching, closed or overlapping standards often provide self-bracing, adding

strength and the ability to withstand the elements. The contour of each standard on a particular bloom should always be identical.

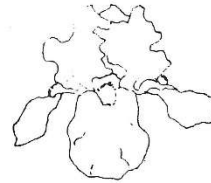
TB Flower Forms



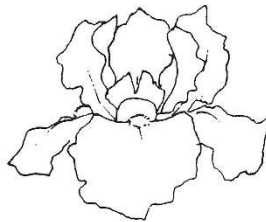
**narrow haft
tucked falls**



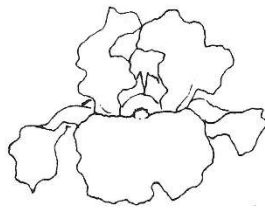
**hanging, narrow,
pinched falls**



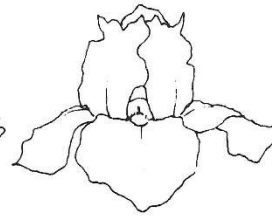
narrow falls



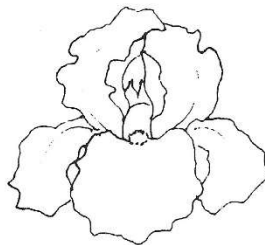
open standards



wide, flaring falls



conical standards



domed standards

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 narrower 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, strap-like falls or falls which appear to have been “pinched”.

The position of the falls can be flaring, hanging, or tucked. As in the standard, 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 aril and arilbred iris).

The haft is that portion on the falls where it connects to the body of the flower. 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 be penalized.

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. Freezing temperatures can cause a “crepe-like” texture on the petals. A flower that does not maintain its form and color saturation for at least three days should lose the entire ten points.

4. 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.

An award-winning iris is immediately recognized in the garden. An iris may have every asset previously discussed, but if it lacks attractiveness, it will be of little value in the garden. Distinctiveness accounts for only 10 points and awards should not be given to a variety simply because of its individuality. 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 4 to 5 yards (3.7 to 4.6 meters) 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 re-bloom 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 for only those varieties which clearly excel in all areas.

EXHIBITION JUDGING: Horticultural Entries of Tall Bearded 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.

Point scales are used to encourage consistent evaluation of specimens on the show bench. Swift and quality performance is demanded of the exhibition judge, making it impractical to point score every entry. The point scale is useful to the student judge in learning the special requirements of the class. It is especially useful in selecting the best specimen of the show. Consistency must be observed in judging all classes.

SCALE OF POINTS Exhibition Judging of Horticultural TB Iris

1. Cultural Perfection					75
	a. Flower			45	
		i. Color	15		
		ii. Size	5		
		iii. Substance	10		
		iv. Form	15		
	b. Stalk			30	
		i. Open Blooms	15		
		ii. Branch Balance & Bud Placement	15		
2. Condition & Grooming					25
TOTAL					100

1. Cultural Perfection - 75 points

It is here that the exhibitor's performance as a horticulturalist is being evaluated. The use of point scales is for comparison of relative values of the characteristics which make a good specimen. The best way to learn to point score is to take one characteristic and decide what each specimen lacks in perfection for its variety, subtracting points for deficiencies. As there is no set rule which specifies the exact number of points to deduct for every fault, one must assess penalties for each defect in proportion to its deviation from typical performance of that variety. Over-emphasis on any particular characteristic must be avoided.

a. Flower (45 points). It should be noted that color, substance, and form are separate and distinct characteristics of the flower but are closely related and interdependent. To score a flower at half value for substance but full value for form and color would be inconsistent. If the blossom has lost substance, it is obvious that its form and color have deteriorated. A deformed flower that scores no points for form should be penalized for color and substance, too.

i. Color (15 points). The intensity of color is determined by the conditions under which the variety was grown. Soil type, fertility and moisture levels, amount and intensity of sunlight, garden temperatures and the cultural practices of the grower all affect color. Because the color of a cultivar can vary, judges must be especially hesitant to declare that a specimen is misnamed. Color intensity, one of the ways a cultivar is identified, varies greatly even in small geographical areas.

Obviously, the color must be typical of the variety or else it is incorrectly named. This knowledge is available only to the judge who has grown the variety and/or seen it growing in other areas.

The flower's color should be clear with no discoloration. Occasional splotches and patches of untypical color will sometimes occur in the petals due to weather vagaries or virus. Flowers that appear on the specimen stalk must show no signs of aging either from natural processes or the environment. The judge must refrain from accusing an exhibitor of over-refrigeration or forcing, as these accusations are impossible to confirm. One fading flower on a stalk will also cost the exhibitor the loss of a substantial number of points since all flowers should be of similar color intensity.

ii. Size (5 points). The size of the flower is primarily determined by the care of its grower. If a flower appears larger than you remember, do not fault it if the stalk is also proportionately large. Proportion is genetically determined and is altered only in the rarest circumstances. Undersized flowers clearly indicate the stalk is not well grown and must be penalized.

iii. Substance (10 points). Substance is the inner tissue structure which determines the durability of the flower. It sustains the form and color of the flower. Lack of substance causes degeneration of the flower form as well as fading or streaking of color.

As a flower ages, slightly detectable watery areas near the petal edges might become visible and might be responsible for some curling of the petal. Substance is not to be confused with texture which is a surface characteristic. Never touch or feel the blossom. Evaluate substance as it appears at the moment of judging.

iv. Form (15 points). Form must be typical of the variety in order to receive the full 15 points, and it can only be properly evaluated if the judge is familiar with the variety as it grows in the garden. There must be no distorted flower parts.

The standards and falls must hold themselves firmly in a manner that is characteristic of the variety. A bad tear in a petal seriously affects the form and must be heavily penalized. Flowers with heavy lace or extreme ruffling complicate the judging process. Unless one has grown these varieties, it is nearly impossible to determine if a small serration in the petal edge is a sign of damage or if it reflects the flower's typical form. A severely damaged standard or fall will cause the specimen to lose the 15 points.

A partially open bloom must be evaluated as a fully opened flower. This specimen can receive a maximum of 10 (from a possible 15) points for form because a partially opened flower cannot be thoroughly examined.

A flower beginning to age will not be of acceptable form and will also be heavily penalized for loss of color.

b. Stalk (30 points).

i. Open blooms (15 points). If a variety typically opens only one blossom at a time in the garden, it should receive the full 15 points on the show bench. Multiple blooms on an exhibition stalk are required only if such performance is typical for the variety.

A stalk with one or two open blooms is just as ideal as one which bears more. As the number of open flowers on a stalk increases, so does the possibility for penalties against color, size, substance, form, and condition.

ii. Branch balance and bud placement (15 points). Again, this trait should be typical for the variety being evaluated. A well grown stalk is more likely to have the best possible branch balance and bud placement than a poorly grown one. This characteristic is especially dependent on horticultural expertise.

Evaluate the specimen at some distance for overall balance and proportion. Verify your impression with a closer examination.

Height of the stalk and branching are genetically controlled, but the judge can penalize any stalk that has been carelessly allowed to grow in a semi-horizontal position, causing it to display distorted branching. Such a stalk will lose all 15 points.

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.

Here the judge is evaluating the skills of the exhibitor in preparing the stalk for entry. Condition refers to the degree of visible improvement in the appearance of the specimen stalk as a result of grooming. Grooming involves those finishing touches the exhibitor makes so that the entry presents its best possible appearance. Judges must never perform any act of grooming nor should they knowingly permit it to be done during judging. Such procedure could cause damage to the specimen. More importantly, it is totally unethical because it is the exhibitor's grooming skills that the judge is evaluating. These 25 possible points cannot begin to overcome the liabilities of a culturally deficient specimen. The points are to be awarded only to the specimen that has been properly prepared for entry by the exhibitor.

Stalk Height. It is generally recommended that a stalk be exhibited at an appropriate height that is proportional to container and stalk. Indeed, proportion is an individual perception, and the suggestion here is only to avoid extremes. Stalks can behave unpredictably in strange weather or differing climates, so very few points can be subtracted under such circumstances.

Foliage. Was all diseased foliage neatly removed or trimmed? Trimming is necessary when there is faint discoloration, disease, or injury to leaf edges. Such procedure should remove less than one-fourth inch of foliage edges and should follow the natural contour of the leaf in its entirety. When the tip of the leaf is brown, removing that tip bluntly or trimming of more than one quarter of an inch from the leaf edge is unacceptable.

Spathes. If a flower has been removed, ascertain that the spathe has not been damaged and is intact. Detectable trimming of the spathe is unacceptable.

Branches. A branch can be removed where a leaf conceals its connection to the stalk, but the stalk and foliage should not display any visible damage.

Cleanliness. The stalk, flower and blossoms should be clean with no dirt, dust, or spray residues, if possible. Slight smudges or fingerprints on the stalks demand little penalty and are easily removed when the exhibitor gently wipes the stalk with soft tissue. There is no penalty for the removal of the bloom (i.e., white powder) from the stalk.

Insects. The presence of one or two aphids or other insects is no cause for alarm, as these creatures can travel from stalk to stalk during or after entry. Infestation, however, is a totally unacceptable condition.

Position in Container. The bottom branch should be exhibited above the container's opening. If a stalk is leaning badly, the judge should check to see if it was originally wedged properly by the exhibitor. If that is the case, the judge should ask the clerk to reposition the stalk, realizing that it could have been jarred by a placement clerk.

EXHIBITION JUDGING

Tall Bearded Iris Seedlings

In judging seedling classes, judges should remember that they are not seeking a superior horticultural specimen. But rather 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.

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 when no entry is worthy of introduction. 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.

SCALE OF POINTS
Exhibition Judging of Tall Bearded Iris Seedlings

1. Flower			40
	a. Color	15	
	b. Form	15	
	c. Substance & Durability	10	
2. Stalk			35
	a. Poise & Balance	15	
	b. Number of Buds	10	
	c. Branching	10	
3. Distinctiveness			25
TOTAL			100

A prepared judge should have received and studied the show schedule well in advance of the show. A copy of the *Handbook For Judges* should always be present, along with a copy of the AIS Check List(s), Registrations and Introductions booklets (R&Is), or access to the online AIS Iris Register and the Iris Encyclopedia. Carefully review the portion of “Duties and Responsibilities of Judges,” “Organizing and Presenting an Iris Show” and “Rules and Regulations of an Iris Show” that pertain to exhibition judging before arriving at the show. To assist with identification, judges are allowed to use electronic devices to access the AIS Iris Encyclopedia and the most recent AIS checklist.