

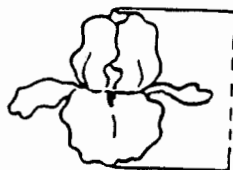
## CHAPTER 7

### BORDER BEARDED IRISES

**Definition :** Erect, branched stems from 41 to 70 cm (16 to 27 1/2 inches) in height, bearing flowers no more than 13 cm (5 inches) in "width," measured in natural position from center fall tip to center fall tip, and overall size ideally no more than 22 cm (8 1/2 inches) in combined "width" and "height," measured on the vertical from the highest point of the standards to the lowest point of the falls [see illustrations below]; leaves erect, in scale with and not obscuring the inflorescence; typically blooming with the tall bearded irises, which they closely resemble except that all plant and flower parts are reduced in size to balance the reduced height.



"Width"



"Height"

Maximum overall size : "Width" + "Height" = 22 cm (8 1/2 in.)

Fully expanded but fresh flowers to be measured in their natural position.

### GARDEN JUDGING

Any bearded iris conforming to the definition is eligible for registration as a border bearded. There is no preference between the taller, larger examples and the shorter, smaller ones, which may be close to miniature tall bearded size. However, judges must understand the need for proportion and balance in an ideal specimen, e.g., the maximum flower size permitted is not suitable for plants blooming at the lower end of the height range. Flower

size, as well as length and width of foliage and diameter of stem, need to be reduced proportionally as height is reduced in order that the whole plant be harmoniously in balance. It is difficult to commit artistic effect to a mathematical formula since so many variables affect the overall look, but studies of proportion of stems and flowers in existing plants indicate that, as a rule of thumb, height should be approximately 3 to 3 1/4 times the overall size of the flowers. Equally important but more difficult to analyze is the balance between flower stalk and plant; in general, both thickness of stem and length and width of foliage must accord visually with stalk height and flower size. The border bearded in many ways resembles the tall bearded in color, finish and style, but a miniature requires a certain delicacy which is achieved only with perfect balance in all of its parts. The true border bearded has a distinctive character of its own and must never appear to be merely a foreshortened tall bearded.

Conformity to height and size limitations should be judged on the basis of "typical" performance. Plants consistently exceeding the height and/or flower size maximums are disqualified; however, an occasional slightly taller-than-normal stalk in a plant which is usually "in class" should not remove the variety from consideration for awards, particularly if the aberration does not include much larger than normal flowers. Judgment of such a variety should be withheld until it can be observed in other gardens and/or other seasons to determine its typical performance.

The first border bearded irises were segregants from tall bearded breeding, as many are today. Typically, these bloom with their tall bearded brethren. However, as fertile intermediates, tetraploid species and remontant lines become more heavily involved in border bearded families, season of bloom becomes more difficult to define. For that reason, and because flowering sequence of the classes in various climates may vary, "season of bloom" must be considered a continuum with no sharply defined parameters and an outstanding border bearded specimen should never be penalized for blooming earlier or later than the norm, so long as it fits the class in every other particular.

## INTRODUCED VARIETIES AND SEEDLINGS

The point scales shown here are not used routinely by the experienced judge, but are useful as guidelines in giving relative value to the specifics being judged. The point scales can be of immense value to the student, and even to the experienced judge when faced with evaluating irises that appear to be essentially equal.

### SCALE OF POINTS

1. Overall Proportion .....	25
2. Flower .....	30
a. Color and Finish .....	10
b. Form .....	10
c. Substance & Durability .....	10
3. Stalk .....	20
a. Proportion .....	10
b. Branching & Buds .....	10
4. Plant and Foliage .....	10
5. Distinctiveness .....	15
	<u>100</u>

#### 1. OVERALL PROPORTION - 25 points

Each part of the plant, including flower size and style, stem height and thickness, and foliage length and width, should be considered in relation to each other part and points awarded or deducted according to how well the parts "fit" the whole. Nevertheless, because good proportion and balance are essential to the basic character of the border bearded iris, a pronounced lack of overall proportion disqualifies the plant from consideration for any award.

## 2. FLOWER - 30 points

a) **Color and Finish** (10 points). The border bearded color palette is virtually limitless, including all colors and patterns available in tall bearded, as well as variations derived from species or from other median classes. Whatever the color or pattern, it must "fill the eye." It is probably true that the smaller the flower the more important color is, but the iris, even in its smallest forms, is not a plant used purely for masses of landscape color. It is well to assess the color of the flowers from across the garden, but equally important to view them close up; some irises, notably the subtle blends, are appreciated for their gentle nuances of color, even though they have no compelling garden presence. Whether strong or subtle, color should hold well throughout the life of the flower; some colors naturally lighten a bit as the flower expands, but unstable color which results in unsightly bleaching is a serious fault. Finish or texture (type of petal surface, e.g., matte, velvety, satiny, crystalline) is an important color adjunct and should be considered to the extent it enhances or detracts from the underlying color. Beard colors, which may blend, harmonize or sharply contrast with the color of the petals, should also be judged in terms of their contribution to the total color effect.

b) **Form** (10 points). Good basic architectural form is of paramount importance, and while decoration (ruffling, lace, etc.) is generally considered an asset, smaller iris flowers require a certain restraint in order that decoration never overwhelm the underlying shape. Unusual beard variations, such as horns, spoons and flounces, are permitted but should be similarly restrained. Due to the compactness of the border iris flower, there is a tendency toward shorter and consequently open standards. Closed or arched and nearly closed standards are preferred. However, flowers with somewhat more open standards are acceptable provided that the standards are at least erect or cupped and firmly held, the overall flower shape is pleasing, and the form and color of any inner parts thus displayed truly merit attention. Standards which spring wide open from the base or twist in an unattractive manner, resulting in structural imbalance and disharmony, are severely penalized. Generally, irises in the border bearded height

range are viewed from above, and for that reason their falls require some flare, slight or pronounced, in order to be properly displayed; the degree of flare should be appropriate to the height of the flower stalk. It is most important that close scrutiny of such details be supplemented by viewing the stalk of flowers from sufficient distance to gain perspective. No individual structural quality is as important as its contribution to the overall design.

c) **Substance and Durability** (10 points). Substance is the tissue structure which lends strength or firmness to the flower parts and renders them able to withstand the caprices of weather over a period of time; it includes but is not limited to thickness of petal. The compact structure of border irises generally results in very good substance, but petal thickness per se is a dimension, and for best proportion all dimensions should be in scale. Extreme thickness of petal is superfluous in small flowers and may result in rigidity, which detracts from charm or personality. It may even interfere with the unfurling of the petals or render them unduly subject to fracture. Either of these effects is an extremely serious fault. The border iris flower should have sufficient substance to support its form; it should be able to flutter a bit in a breeze, but return to its poise in calm and not look permanently disarranged. Durability of flowers should be judged over a period of several days in order to determine resilience and lasting quality. "Normal" durability varies from climate to climate, but barring extreme weather conditions, a flower with adequate substance generally can be expected to remain in good condition for about three days.

### 3. STALK - 20 points

a) **Proportion** (10 points). Proportion as it applies to the stalk is extremely important. The ideal border iris stalk is relatively slim and graceful but must be strong enough to support the blossoms. In addition, both the diameter of the stalk and the type and placement of its branches must visually balance both the plant from which it emerges and the size and style of the flowers which it displays. Excessively thick, clubby stems with branches so short as to crowd the blossoms are to be severely penalized. A

guideline to proportion is suggested above (see page 74.) It is based upon study of existing border irises, most of which present one or two open flowers at a time. However, the underlying principle involves not merely flower size, but the relationship of total color mass to the stalk which displays it. For that reason, certain flowers with extremely wide parts may appear too large for their height even though conforming to the suggested measurements, and very small flowers presented in profusion on multi-branched stems may produce sufficient color mass to balance stem height and give a pleasing effect, even though they measure much smaller than the formula suggests. In sum, no formula can or should be substituted for an innate sense of good proportion, which is developed only through broad experience with the border bearded class.

b) **Branching and Buds** (10 points). A border bearded iris stalk should have, at a minimum, two well placed branches and a terminal and five buds. Particularly in taller specimens, more and wider branching is preferred, with a corresponding increase in the number of buds. Generally, more generous branching and greater bud count prolong the season of bloom and are to be encouraged. However, care should be taken not merely to reward these qualities for their own sake, but to observe the flowering sequence to be sure that the blossoms are always presented attractively on the stalk without crowding and that the variety does not open so many buds concurrently that its season of bloom is actually curtailed rather than prolonged. These judgments should not be made on first year plants, since only in established clumps can the sequence of stem production and placement of stalks be observed. Flower stalks maturing in sequence can greatly extend season of bloom and are an important asset. However, great numbers of stalks in flower at one time, particularly those presenting many flowers simultaneously, may result in an untidy appearance of the clump as a whole. Branching and bud count should be considered not just quantitatively, but as they affect both artistic presentation and duration of the bloom season.

#### **4. PLANT AND FOLIAGE - 10 points**

The foliage is an important component of overall balance and must be in harmony with the inflorescence. It must be neither scanty nor too lush and in both height and width must complement the flower stalk. It should be erect in habit. The leaves of some varieties are slightly falcate or exhibit a slight twist, and these characteristics in moderation do not detract from the overall appearance of the clump. However, weak foliage which folds over at the tips presents an extremely messy appearance and should be penalized accordingly. The foliage should be of good color and not overly susceptible to damage from either climatic conditions or disease. Vigor of the plants should be judged with particular attention, since while many border irises bred specifically for the class are quite vigorous, some from primarily tall bearded lines tend to be slow or finicky growers. No matter how beautiful or excellently proportioned the plant, it will not be useful in the garden if it grows poorly or produces stalks on all of its increase, resulting in "bloom-out." These faults should be heavily penalized. Border irises should be expected to perform as well in the garden as quality tall bearded. Those which exceed this expectation, particularly those capable of producing especially generous bloom, sequential stalks or true rebloom without sacrificing increase for the subsequent year, should be duly rewarded for superior performance.

#### **5. DISTINCTIVENESS - 15 points**

Distinctiveness is defined as those characteristics which set something apart from others of its kind. By definition, a border iris should be instantly recognizable as such, but to receive points under this attribute, it must also differ from existing members of the class in some very positive way. Distinctiveness includes such qualities as a new and beautiful combination of petal and beard color or a new pattern or combination of patterns. In the broader sense, however, the term could apply to a new iris similar in color and form to an existing one but having far superior plant habit, or one with outstanding petal finish which sets a plentiful color aglow.

In order to evaluate distinctiveness, it is necessary that the judge be familiar with a great many of the varieties in commerce so as to be able to make valid comparisons. As the border bearded class expands and progresses, some very important and desirable qualities which would be considered distinctive today may and hopefully will become commonplace!

