

## CHAPTER 11

### MINIATURE DWARF BEARDED IRISES

**Definition:** Bearded irises up to 20 cm (8 inches) in height. Stems are usually unbranched; flowers are 4 to 7.5 cm (1.6 to 3 inches) wide; earliest blooming of all bearded irises and with pure *I. pumila* usually the first to bloom.

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Growth habits of *Iris pumila*

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*I. pumila* is the most important species in the background of modern miniature dwarf bearded (MDB) irises. Most recent varieties are one-half to three-quarters *I. pumila*, and MDB irises of purely *I. pumila* origin are nearly a class in themselves. The balance of the parentage in hybrid miniature dwarf bearded irises is frequently complex, deriving from tetraploid tall or border bearded irises, the 40-chromosome complex of species recently reclassified as *I. lutescens*, and, increasingly, *I. aphylla*.

## GARDEN JUDGING

### INTRODUCED CULTIVARS AND SEEDLINGS

MDB irises should have smaller and dainty flowers, with flowers and stems being in proportion to the overall plant. The

great diversity in the background of MDB irises causes a relatively wide range of height in this class. A variety which occasionally sends up a stem above the class height limit may be acceptable if bloom size and other characteristics are those of the MDB class. However, this does not permit short, large flowered SDBs to be registered/introduced as MDBs. A variety purported to be an MDB but not conforming to the class should not receive a vote for an award, whatever its other qualities.

### SCALE OF POINTS

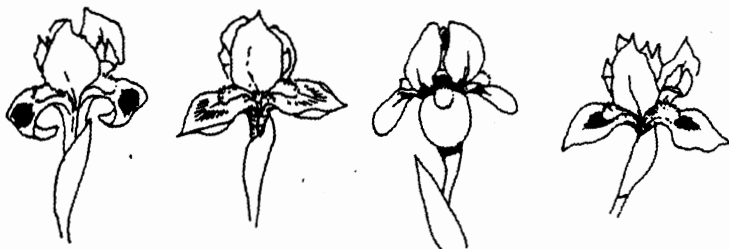
1. <b>Flower</b> .....	40
a. Color .....	20
b. Form .....	15
c. Substance and Texture .....	5
2. <b>Plant and Foliage</b> .....	30
a. Leaves and Stalk .....	10
b. Floriferousness .....	10
c. Vigor .....	10
3. <b>Overall Proportion</b> .....	15
4. <b>Distinctiveess</b> .....	<u>15</u>
	100

#### 1. FLOWER - 40 points

a. **Color** (20 points). In judging, remember that color in a given variety can vary from season to season, from garden to garden. The spot pattern derived from *I. pumila* may be exceptionally sharp and clear in a particular year or soil but fuzzy and indistinct in another. A variety with a spot pattern that is sharp and clear growing with others that are fuzzy is superior. Halos, divided spots or "wings," and other variations on the spot pattern should be equally clear and distinct. An overlay of another color should enhance the overall color effect and not appear muddy or smeared. Irregular streaking or blotching of a dark color, particularly noticeable on light colored flowers,

tends to appear in cold, wet weather on varieties that are normally clear. Varieties that do not show such streaking or blotching when others do should be credited for this trait. Beard color can be very important to the overall effect. Matching or contrasting colors are preferable to indistinct ones. Style arm color can be another significant factor, especially in flowers with open standards that show off the style arms.

b. **Form** (15 points). Flaring or horizontal falls are more important with these very low growing plants than with the taller irises since the flowers are generally viewed from above. *I. pumila* typically gives to its progeny one of two characteristic forms: falls that curl under or falls that flare out and roll to a point at the end, the "star" or "lilting" fall. Either of these fall forms may be acceptable. The criterion is whether the color and pattern of the falls are displayed or hidden by the form. If the falls that curl under are relatively wide at the hafts and do not curl under too abruptly, they may display a large amount of color and pattern. Falls that roll to a point, if not extreme, may have a certain daintiness or reveal an interesting color contrast on the reverse of the falls, enhancing the general effect. Standards may be open or closed. Firmly held, open standards that reveal an interesting interior, such as matching or contrasting style arms, are as desirable as classic domed standards. Beard form can also be a distinct attribute. Neatly clipped, bushy beards are preferable to thin, straggly ones.



The dainty flowers of the very early miniature dwarfs have striking color patterns and variations in form.

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c. **Substance and Texture** (5 points). Substance should be crisp and firm. Weak or limp substance, besides being a fault in itself, will detract from the form. Texture can be silky, velvety or otherwise, but it should enhance the color effect and add that sparkle and style that separate the excellent from the ordinary. Although allotted few points, substance and texture can be a crucial influence on color and form.

## 2. **PLANT AND FOLIAGE** - 30 points

a. **Leaves and Stalk** (10 points). Leaves should be neat and short, never taller than the flowers. Width of leaves should be proportional to that of other plant parts. While flowers with relatively narrow or dainty petals usually look best with narrow leaves, flowers with wider petals may look best with equally wider leaves. The stalk of an MDB that is purely *I. pumila* will typically be an elongated perianth tube with the ovary directly on the rhizome. Other MDB irises will have stalks with varying proportions of stem to perianth tube. Most will not branch, but if branching does occur, it should not crowd or confuse the effect of the flowers in the clump. Stalks should be clean and slender with inconspicuous spathe valves.

b. **Floriferousness** (10 points). Number of blooms and duration of blooming are the factors to be considered here. Some varieties produce a huge mass of flowers lasting only a few days; others string a few flowers over several weeks, never producing much of a show. Both should be faulted. Multiple blooms may result from several stalks per rhizome as with *I. pumila*, extra buds in a socket as with many of the hybrid miniature dwarfs, or a later bloom branch as with MDB irises derived from at least a quarter tall bearded and/or *I. aphylla*. Any of these may be effective in producing more and longer bloom. Whatever its source, the goal is a variety that produces many flowers, preferably for two or more weeks.

c. **Vigor** (10 points). Miniature dwarfs vary considerably in vigor. While overabundant vigor and increase in a few varieties produce crowded clumps requiring division every year or two, lack of vigor is more often a problem. Varieties of pure *J. pumila* origin and many of the MDB hybrids typically do not do well in areas with mild winters and are penalized for this. The ideal is a variety, regardless of derivation, that does well in a wide range of climatic conditions. The judge should penalize varieties that do well only in milder climates.

### 3. **OVERALL PROPORTION** - 15 points

Proportion is the relationship between the various plant parts, including petal width to flower size, standards to falls, flower size to plant height, plant size to leaf height, leaf width to petal width and rhizome size to overall plant size. Flowers that are proportionally too large for the plant are as out of scale as those that are too small. Flowers blooming down in the leaves have, among other faults, a serious problem of proportion in stem height to leaf height. While not actually visible, oversized rhizomes on small plants prohibit neat, compact clumps.

### 4. **DISTINCTIVENESS** - 15 points

A variety that is unique in some characteristic is preferred to one that is not. A variety which premieres a new color may have points deducted because of less than perfect form but gain a high score for distinctiveness. It is important here for the judge to be aware of the state of the art in MDB breeding, of the advances made as well as existing gaps. Too many unique varieties are overlooked due to relatively minor faults, while less faulted commonplace varieties gain votes. A judge can recognize distinctiveness only by knowing what is available in the MDB class.