

PART THREE

Feeding Your Container-Grown Iris

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DOUGLAS H. CHYZ, SOUTH CAROLINA



'Iko Iko' (Joseph Musacchia 2018, LA)



'Tectorum Alba' (Carl Sprenger 1901, SPEC)

Okay kids, dinner's ready, let's eat. I don't miss a meal and am a notorious junk food junkie. Your container grown plants, not just iris, like to eat also. The nutrients in your container soil and watering or rain are not enough to sustain good health over an extended period. Soil nutrients get depleted, and water or rain can provide some replacements, but assistance is needed.

Before I get too far into this, you need to know that I am a *seat of the pants* gardener. I read a little here and there, talk with folks, and then just follow my nose. So, this is what has worked for me with most of my container experience when I lived in Virginia, just south of Washington, DC in hardiness zone 7.

The first thing to keep in mind is watering your containers. Containers, unlike garden bed areas, have a limited area for plant roots to spread to when looking for water and they get root bound rather quickly. So, in most cases watering daily, especially during the growing season, is necessary. Most iris tend to go dormant in the later summer, so you may think watering is not necessary, but I have found that, especially in darker color containers, that the iris can cook in the late summer heat, so I water routinely all the way up to later fall. In the winter I water to maintain a semi-moist to slightly dry soil. Remember, in freezing zones, water expands when it freezes and can crack your containers so be careful if you have containers, like clay pots, that may be susceptible to cracking or breaking. Even plastic ones can crack or split along the sides.

If you have containers with water reservoirs, you may be able to adjust the timing on watering. On many plastic containers I purchase there is a spot in the bottom to drill out for water drainage. I do not use that; I normally drill drain holes up the side of

the container, an inch or two, to provide an internal reservoir.

Okay, let's get into the meat and potatoes stuff. Buckle your seatbelt! I like to feed my container grown iris about once a month. I have a two-gallon watering can that I use and add in ingredients based on two gallons. There are three water soluble fertilizers that I use, one is an all purpose, 24-8-16, one is a bloom booster, 15-30-15, and the other is tomato, 18-18-21 with recommended use rates of one tablespoon per gallon of water. Yes, they all have a reasonably high nitrogen content, but I use them in quarter to half strength. And I rotate through all three and then start over. So, in the two gallons of water I add one half to one tablespoon of fertilizer, maybe a half a can of beer (taste the beer first—do not give your iris bad beer) a squirt of dishwashing liquid, and sometimes a tablespoon of instant iced tea mix, then I just soak each container. I warned you, and don't ask, I cannot explain all of the reasoning. I adapted this recipe from a Jerry Baker booklet in the early 1990s; Jerry Baker was dubbed America's Master Gardener and had remedies for everything inside and outside of the house. I have had good luck and good bloom from my container grown iris using this method. If it ain't broke, don't fix it!

A little side bar. I use this same method for my iris and garden beds. I have a cup sprayer that, when filled to the top, will have sprayed twenty gallons of water when it becomes empty. So, I add four to five tablespoons of fertilizer, a can of beer, a couple of tablespoons of dishwashing liquid, and a couple of tablespoons of instant iced tea mix, fill with water to the twenty gallon mark, and spray away. Again, about once a month. In my iris beds I also sprinkle 4-26-26 fertilizer, around the plants twice a year, that I purchase from Jim Hedgecock at Comanche Acres Iris Garden.

I am thinking I will talk about growth in containers in Part four. How long do you think you can keep tall bearded iris in a one gallon container? Tune in and be amazed.



“TALL TALK”

The only TALL BEARDED IRIS magazine!

\$12.00 brings you two issues per year.



Tall Bearded Iris Society
Phyllis Wilburn

PO Box 9, Rescue, CA 95672-0009
abirder@aol.com

Visit our website - www.tbisonline.com!!

2023 AIS Membership Drive



A FREE annual one-Section membership (e.g., Spuria, Louisiana, etc.) when purchasing AIS Full Membership, currently at \$45. See details at: <https://bit.ly/AISMD2023>

