

To the Squamish Gardeners,

Oct 21, 2008

Being inexperienced presenting a topic in this form, I found it hard to prepare, looking for a good mix of interesting facts and useful information. I fear I have fallen down on both accounts. In the Farmer's Market setting, questions are posed and the answer is usually focused and functional. In an informative talk, what is relevant to some may not interest others, and without experience, it is very hard to recognize what makes a good presentation. For that I apologize.

I have spent the morning after, reviewing my presentation, and feel sorry that I have been ineffectual as a speaker. The approach I took to the topic IRIS was far too broad to offer much of meaning in an hour. I do not feel that I have not done the iris justice, missing many of the more interesting points, relevant garden information and its worthiness as a plant in your garden.

Along with the handout, which I have included as an attachment, what I should have told you was:

- What we think of as the Tall Bearded (TB) Iris comes in varieties 4 inches tall to 4 feet.
- Blooms vary in size, the largest and newer varieties, having been bred to have thicker petals that hold up to the rain and wind. A useful piece of information when considering the weather here.
- The height of the Bearded iris is divided into 6 classifications.
- 50 years ago, the flower color was broken into 5 main categories. This has grown to over 10 with the increase of hybridizing. eg. Plicata, Bi-Tone, Bi-Color
- There are at least 5 categories used to describe just the edge of the petal, eg. Ruffling, Tailored, Frilled
- The shorter the variety, the more shade they can handle, the smallest being useful as an under planting for azalea, rhodos and other shrubs that don't want their roots cultivated. They can be left for years with out dividing.
- TB iris have a coarse appearance and are useful in the back part of the garden, using softer textured perennials in front to distract from the plain foliage once blooming is finished.
- TB are the only iris necessary to plant the rhizome above the ground. Wet soil or leaf debris covering the rhizome for the wet season, will likely cause rot.
  
- Siberian iris has a finer grass like texture, working well as a feature in a grass garden.
- They range in height from 2-4 feet.
- An iris that is often mistaken as a dwarf variety of Siberian (there are none) is *I. setosa* and a common cultivar is 'Pristine Blue'. It is in the same Sub genus and section as Siberian Iris (series Sibiricae), but part of another series, series Tripetalae, referring to the appearance of having only 3 petals. The standards are so small, that all you notice is the 3 falls. Short lived but is reliable as a self-seeder, so it is important to leave the seed heads on to develop if you appreciate its continued existence in your garden.
- Siberian irises are drought tolerant once established, but do not complain when put into environments of less than full sun.

- Japanese Iris also has narrow grass like foliage.
- Japanese and Louisiana iris make good water feature plants in our area, although Japanese iris do not like wet roots over the winter months. Louisiana can handle it; although mulching the crown is important to give added protect it from the frost.
- In Japan, when you see pictures of Japanese iris in bloom in large ponds, the water level is generally only raised to cover the plant crowns while in full bloom. It is done for aesthetic reasons, not because that is the growing environment that the iris prefers. Continual submersion in water will eventually weaken the roots, and the plant will lose vigour.
- Despite being suitable for wet soils, I have had success growing Japanese iris in a dry raised bed (beside TB), paying little attention to its specific water needs. If placing in hot sun, moisture is important, but use in part sun locations allow for dryer soils. Full sun is ideal, but it is not limiting, test your plants.
- Louisiana iris have a rather interesting life cycle compared to other iris. They begin growing in fall, carry on through winter and complete their growing season with the flowering. They go into a period of dormancy over summer, when other iris are producing root and new buds. If hot and dry, they can shed their leaves, until new growth begins again when soils cool in the fall. In the past 2 years, with very little added water, my plants, located in a raise, rather dry bed, have managed to keep their leaves. This shows that, even in less than ideal soils and settings, Squamish weather patterns makes them a low maintenance plant.
- Mulch is important to help insulate the crowns and rhizome from the freeze and thaw that we have with our uneven winter weather.

I hope this information fills in gaps that I left in the presentation. Although I did not offer slides, I have many photos on my web site [www.plantsandpots.ca](http://www.plantsandpots.ca) I would also like to say that over the winter I will be making on going additions of information about iris on the webs site, and welcome questions, at 604-898-4398 or [plantsandpots@shaw.ca](mailto:plantsandpots@shaw.ca) for which I can post responses.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present to your group, I found it a great learning experience.

Sincerely,  
Liza Bennett  
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## Comparison of Iris Types

| TYPE          | ZONE | SUN                      | SOIL                     | WATER                            | MULCH | BLOOM           |
|---------------|------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|-----------------|
| Japanese      | 5-8  | full                     | slight acidic, rich      | moist, not wet in winter         | yes   | After TB        |
| Siberian      | 4-9  | full, tolerates part sun | rich                     | drought tolerant, dryer in shade | yes   | After TB        |
| Louisiana     | 6-9  | full, 1/2 day minimum    | rich                     | wet soils, water feature         | yes   | After TB        |
| Crested       | 4-10 | filtered                 | rich                     | moist                            | yes   | Before TB       |
| Bulbous       | 5-8  | full                     | good drainage, rich      | dry                              | yes   | before/with TB  |
| Bearded (TB)  | 3-9  | full/hot                 | sharp drainage, rich     | drought tolerant                 | no    | mid-late spring |
| Pacific Coast | 7-9  | full                     |                          | dry                              | no    | Before TB       |
| Spuria        | 6-9  | full                     | alkaline soil, high fert | dry summer dormancy              | no    | Before TB       |
| Aril          | 7-9  | full/hot                 |                          | dry summer dormancy              | no    | beforeTB        |