

Variety flower

Irises provide color even for brown-thumbed gardeners

Question: The iris season has come and gone. I admired some in a neighbor’s yard and want to buy some for myself. Any suggestions?

Answer: Asking for recommendations on what irises to purchase is a simple question with a complicated set of answers. I’m not known for my brevity, but let me give it a try.

First, it must be determined what kind of iris you admired. Literally thousands of cultivars have been developed by breeders. The most fundamental division of the iris family is between bearded and beardless irises. What you saw in your neighbor’s yard were probably tall bearded irises.

Even the most brown-thumbed gardener can have a stunning display when following a few basic recommendations.

1. Utilizing the



Jack Finney
Master Gardner

directions on the package, work in some low nitrogen fertilizer such as 6-10-10 where you are going to put them. More is not better. Too much nitrogen can harm them.

2. Plant them in full sun.
3. Locate them in a place that doesn’t stay wet or damp, that is, in well-drained soil.
4. Cover the rhizome with no more than one inch of soil. It is ideal to have the top of the rhizome showing.
5. Give them a deep watering about twice a week. More nuances directions and a video can be found out: <https://www.schreinersgardens.com/>



Last Laugh Shoop 2000



PHOTOS COURTESY JACK FINNEY/MASTER GARDNER

Its light-blue color makes the Absolute Treasure Tasco stand on its own.

how-to-grow-care-for-bearded-iris. There is no need to stress yourself out when planting bearded irises. Most of them are cast-iron plants. It is really hard to kill them. I’ve even had them grow on the garden refuse pile after I tossed them in there the year before.

Mid-America Garden, Schreiner’s Iris Garden and Bluebird Iris Garden are three great sources for tall beards. The last is especially good for older irises that might not be widely available in commerce. Tall bearded irises that are new on the market can run \$55-\$65, but there is no need to pay that much. There are many beauties that cost \$8-\$13.

There are a few things to keep in mind when selecting a tall barded iris.

6. Trust the written description more than

the photos. Cameras often do not accurately record red-violet and blue-violet colors.

7. The description of an outstanding iris will not that the iris has more than three branches. Five plus a spur would be stunning. More than seven buds is to be expected. Bud count can go up to 13. These are important because they relate to the length of time you will have blooms on the plant in your garden. If the description says nothing about branching or bud count, then the iris might be really beautiful but blooms will come and go more quickly than desired.

8. Another thing to consider is whether or not the “falls” are flaring. The standards of a bearded iris flower are the three petals that stand up. The “falls”

traditionally have been the three petals of the flower that fall down. You can see the flaring in pictures by looking at two falls on either side of the one that is front and center in paper or electronic catalogues. The problem with flaring falls is that if you will be looking at the iris from a distance in your garden, you lose a lot of color visually. You are looking more at the edges of the falls than at the whole lengths of the falls. If you will be placing the iris so you will be mostly looking down on it, then it is not an issue.

9. Some of my favorite tall bearded irises are montmarte, absolute treasure, sea power, stairway to heaven, before the storm, dusky challenger and last laugh.

Tall bearded irises are stunning additions to any garden. The flowers call



Before the Storm Innerst 1988

to admirers’ eyes in May, and the sword-like leaves provide an attractive contrast to other plants which have more common leaf shapes.

Do you have a question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at ask.extension.org/ask. Presently, the plant clinic is closed until further notice due to public safety orders.