

# Handbook For Judges and Show Officials

## Ch 10 MTB Iris



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NOTE: As a prelude to this chapter, it is recommended that judges read “Essay: Comparison of BB, IB, and MTB Iris” which can be found in the printed edition of the *Handbook for Judges* and online.

This chapter and others from the *Handbook for Judges* are available online. It is recommended that judges and other readers check the Introduction and Table of Contents in the full version of the *Handbook* in order to know the full list of available resources, e.g., Glossary, essays, Judge’s Activity Record, etc.

## Chapter 10

### MINIATURE TALL BEARDED IRIS

Approved by the AIS Board of Directors, February 9, 2021

**Definition:** Plants 16 to 27.5 inches (41 to 70 cm) tall; flowers not more than 6 inches (15 cm) of combined height and width; flowers borne on slender, wiry, flexuous or curving stalks 1/8 to 3/16 inch (3 to 5 mm) wide directly under the terminal flowers and increasing gradually to about 5/8 inch (16 mm) at the ground line. Although most miniature tall bearded iris bloom with the tall bearded iris, it is size and proportion that define this class, not season of bloom.

The active judge should be familiar with several in-class MTBs in the garden to understand the dainty nature of both the stalk and flower. When the class was created, the pioneers established clear maximum size for the flowers, slenderness of the stalks and height of the stalk. These criteria have served the class well and today we have a large variety of flowers that meet all of these expectations. MTBs may perform differently than expected, especially in very warm and very cold climates.

Any variety that consistently fails to meet guidelines for height, flower size and stem diameter should be penalized. Regardless of height, proportion and balance are essential for the ideal specimen. Flower size as well as width of foliage and diameter of stem need to be reduced proportionately as height is reduced in order that the whole plant be harmoniously in balance.

Conformity to height and size limitations should be judged on the basis of typical performance of the variety. The occasional occurrence of too tall stalks or too large blooms should be noted and considered but it should not remove an otherwise notable variety from consideration for awards.

Pleasing fragrance is an asset in miniature tall bearded iris because they are popular as cut flowers. A seedling with unpleasant aroma may be unacceptable for introduction unless it is a truly superior garden subject.

**GARDEN JUDGING**  
**Introduced Varieties & Seedlings of MTB Iris**

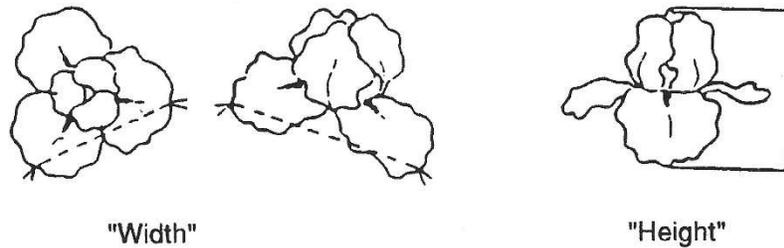
**SCALE OF POINTS**

1. Proportion			25
2. Flower			40
	a. Color & Finish	20	
	b. Form	10	
	c. Substance & Durability	10	
3. Stalk			15
	a. Buds & Branches	10	
	b. Characteristics	5	
4. Foliage			10
5. Distinctiveness			10
TOTAL			100

1. Proportion - 25 points

Miniature tall bearded (MTB) iris are not simply tall bearded iris with small flowers. All aspects of the plant are far daintier. Guidelines for stem diameter and the ratio of stalk to foliage have been set to reinforce this slender, graceful effect.

The MTB flower should be not larger than 6 inches (15 cm) of combined height and width (measured from fall tip to fall tip in the natural position of the flower). A number of measurement studies has established a ratio of 4 to 4.5:1 for height of the stalk to the height plus width of the flower as it naturally stands. Blossoms near the maximum of 6 inches of combined height plus width should thus be on stalks in the range of 24 to 27 inches tall and the size of the blooms reduced proportionately on shorter stalks. MTB-sized flowers on cultivars with heights over 26 inches look skimpy unless there is a large number of flowers on the stalk to compensate for the gaps.



Maximum overall size of MTB flower: width + height = 6 inches (15 cm)  
 Measured on fully expanded, fresh flowers in their natural position.

## 2. Flower - 40 points

**a. Color and Finish** (20 points). The color range in diploid MTBs is limited to white, yellow, variegatas, amoenas, neglectas, blues, orchids, purples, plicatas and variegata blends. In the tetraploid varieties, the color palette is opened up to the tangerine tones and some dominant bicolor combinations not found in the diploids. Because MTBs are small flowers, striking color combinations that might be less appealing in a larger flower are appropriate and even admired in these smaller flowers. Smooth, dark colors are needed, as well as red tones. Because many diploid MTBs are descended from *Iris variegata*, there are many varieties with flowers that have heavy striping, which is not a fault. However, the uneven and irregular coloration of some older blues and lavenders is considered a fault. Severe fading of the flowers in any color also is considered a fault. Purple tinted spathes may enhance the blooms.

**b. Form** (10 points). Tailored to lightly ruffled flowers might be more in keeping with the MTBs objective of daintiness than are heavily ruffled types. Flaring and semi-flaring falls are preferred; drooping falls detract. Closed or arched standards are preferred. Open standards may be acceptable if they are held erect and reveal attractively intensified or contrasting color in the center of the flower.

Due to the small size of MTB flowers, there is less "canvas" available for decorations (e.g., heavy ruffling, lace, horns). If present, such decorations should not overwhelm the small flowers. Many MTBs have a slight flip to their falls. This adds a bit of a ruffled look without adding ruffles per se and keeps a wildflower look to the flowers. In the tetraploids the flowers tend to be wider at the haft and the petals themselves are often wider and fuller. Some of these flowers may look out of class but actually measure in class. The judge should not be too quick to dismiss these cultivars. Similarly, dark flowers can appear

bigger than they are. The judge should resort to measuring the flowers of these cultivars if in doubt of their size.

**c. Substance and Durability** (10 points). A good MTB flower should last 3 days under normal weather conditions. Many MTB flowers, especially the diploids, although not stiff or highly-substanced, will remain in a fresh condition for the required 3 days. Conversely, some very heavily-substanced flowers might last only 2 days despite their more rigid petals. Thus, durability can only be determined by actual examination of the days a flower lasts rather than by feeling the petals.

### 3. Stalk - 15 points.

**a. Buds and Branches** (10 points). A minimum of two branches plus terminal with a total of seven buds. Eight to nine buds are preferred on all MTBs.

The stalks of diploid cultivars generally have two or three branches plus a terminal and minimum of seven buds. Cultivars with up to 14 buds are known. The tetraploid cultivars derived from *Iris aphylla* and diploid cultivars from *I. astrachanica* can have the basal branch typical of these species. Because of this basal branch, the area of the stalk right at the base might exceed the recommended maximum diameter but should be at the appropriate size just above this junction.

**b. Characteristics** (5 points). Stalks should be slender and flexuous, not ramrod stiff. Miniature tall bearded iris derived from *Iris aphylla* might have naturally straighter stems than those derived from *I. variegata*. The angle of branching should be graceful. Branches should not parallel the stem so closely that flowers are compressed, nor should they be so widely angled as to look awkward.

### 4. Foliage - 10 points

Foliage should be graceful and in proportion to other parts of the plant. The blooming plant should provide a floriferous display held well above the foliage. The foliage should be erect in habit. The leaves of some varieties are slightly sickle-shaped or exhibit a slight twist. These characteristics in moderation do not detract from the overall appearance of the clump.

Foliage should be no more than two-thirds the height of stems at bloom time, with leaves no more than approximately 1 inch (2.5 cm) wide at the base. The

foliage should also be reduced in both width and length so that the flowers are out of the foliage mound. Wide, coarse and excessively tall foliage are all faults. Dark green to blue-green color is preferred to yellow-green. Purple leaf bases are a desirable feature. The plant should exhibit good health and vigor as indicated by increase and appearance. Disease resistance should be highly rated. Foliage should remain clean well beyond the bloom season.

#### 5. Distinctiveness - 10 points

Distinctiveness can result from improvement of any desirable quality of the plant (e.g., stem or flower) when compared to other similar varieties within the class. Improvements in color range and flower form rate high.

## EXHIBITION JUDGING

### Horticultural Entries of MTB Iris

Exhibition judging of iris is distinctly different from judging in the garden. On the show bench a judge is not trying to determine the qualities and attributes of a particular variety. Rather, the exhibition judge must pass judgement in two areas:

1. Cultural perfection - how well the specimen has been grown by comparing it to the maximum typical performance of the variety being judged.
2. Condition and grooming - how well the specimen was prepared for entry into the exhibition.

Exhibition judging evaluates the specimen as it is shown at the moment the judge sees it.

Although TBs that are larger than normal might be awarded points for an especially well-grown specimen, stalks of MTB cultivars should clearly be in class in terms of both flower and stalk. Flowers and stalks that are out of class should not receive any points for cultural perfection.

Point scales are used to encourage consistent evaluation of specimens on the show bench. Swift and quality performance is demanded of the exhibition judge, making it impractical to point score every entry. The point scale is useful to the student judge in learning the special requirements of the class. It is especially

useful in selecting the best specimen of the show. Consistency must be observed in judging all classes.

**SCALE OF POINTS**  
Exhibition Judging of Horticultural MTB Iris

1. Cultural Perfection					75
	a. Flower			40	
		i. Proportion	10		
		ii. Color & Finish	10		
		iii. Form	10		
		iv. Substance & Durability	10		
	b. Stalk			35	
		i. Proportion	10		
		ii. Branching	15		
		iii. Number of Buds & Blooms	10		
2. Condition & Grooming					25
TOTAL					100

## EXHIBITION JUDGING MTB Seedlings

In judging seedling classes, judges should remember that they are not seeking a superior horticultural specimen. But rather a new cultivar which not only conforms to the guidelines for the class, but exhibits desirable qualities comprising improvement and/or innovation. Condition is not a factor in judging seedlings. In fact, it is preferable that the stalks are not groomed, so that the judge can more easily evaluate such features as branching and bud count. Spent flowers can be removed if done so that the ovary remains visible.

The Exhibition Certificate (EC) is awarded to the “Best Seedling” if one is chosen. The certificate is not a recommendation for introduction, since on the show bench it is not possible to evaluate plant qualities. The Best Seedling Award should not be given when no entry is worthy. Exhibition Certificates are also awarded to seedlings that receive votes from at least five judges on special seedling ballots. Judges visiting a show are urged to review the seedling entries and use these ballots to reward excellence where they find it.

### SCALE OF POINTS Exhibition Judging of MTB Seedlings

1. Proportion			20
2. Flower			45
	a. Color & Finish	20	
	b. Form	15	
	c. Substance & Durability	10	
3. Stalk			20
4. Distinctiveness			15
TOTAL			100

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Notes: Ch 10 MTB Iris