

# Handbook For Judges and Show Officials

## Ch 19 Spuria Iris



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Note: This chapter and others from the *Handbook for Judges* are available online. It is recommended that judges and other readers check out 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 19

### SPURIA IRIS

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**Definition:** Spuria iris are that group of beardless iris listed as Series Spuriae of the Apogon (beardless) subsection.

There are two main groups of spuria species. One group includes dwarf species such as *Iris sintenisii* and *I. graminea*, and these include species with 16 to 34 Chromosomes except for *I. pontica* with 72 chromosomes.

Although the judge may see these dwarf species occasionally on the show bench in the species section of a show, none of these small species has contributed to the modern garden spuria iris. These dwarf species have summer green foliage and grow well in more northerly climates. All of the modern spuria hybrids are descended from rather tall species that, in some climates, are summer dormant. Dormancy is a very climate-specific phenomenon so that in the desert Southwest virtually all cultivars go dormant, except some 38 chromosome species hybrids such as *I. notha* and *I. demetrii* as well as some hybrids from the 44-chromosome group such as *I. carthalinae* and *I. klattii*. In the north, almost none do. Hybridizers have been selecting for shorter growing spuria iris from these tall species, so that now a range of heights from 25" to over 60" can be found in the garden hybrids.

The *World of Irises* and the Check List from the Spuria Iris Society itemize approximately twenty species. It is presently thought that some of the synonyms are repeated and that actually there are approximately sixteen species. Until further work is completed on this section of iris, the number of species cannot be stated definitely. The spuria species grow in the temperate zone from Spain to China, with the greatest concentration in Central Asia. Because of this wide dispersion and varied climatic environs (subtropical to subarctic), no fixed rules can be established to limit stalk height and many other plant characteristics.

Spuria iris normally bloom later than tall bearded iris, with their season of bloom spanning up to a month in cooler climates. As most iris shows and garden judging events are scheduled to coincide with the peak bloom of the tall bearded iris, the judge must make special efforts to evaluate spuria iris growing and blooming in the garden.

The judge must be familiar with newer cultivars growing in the garden. Breeding and selection of spuria cultivars should result in varieties with improved appearance and performance.

## GARDEN JUDGING

### Introduced Cultivars of Spuria Iris

It is very difficult to establish a numerical score for garden judging. The intangibles of charm, beauty and personality are not easily defined. A single viewing of a spuria iris in the garden is never sufficient to judge adequately the plant and its flowers. The following scale of points is a suggested guideline.

### SCALE OF POINTS

#### Garden Judging of Introduced Spuria Iris

1. Clump Effect			15
2. Flower			40
	a. Color	15	
	b. Substance & Durability	15	
	c. Form	10	
3. Plant			35
	a. Stalk & Foliage	15	
	b. Floriferousness	10	
	c. Stamina & Vigor	10	
4. Distinctiveness			10
TOTAL			100

#### 1. Clump Effect – 15 points

The spuria clump is one of the greatest aspects of the spuria plant. Spuria iris do not require the frequent digging and dividing that bearded iris do and the clump should increase in size and continue to be floriferous for many years. The foliage mass should be a dark green and the stalks should be tall enough to rise out of the foliage with all the flowering positions on the stalk occurring above the foliage. Cultivars that make sparse foliage, have fewer blooms in the clump and/ or have flowers that do not clear the foliage are faulted.

## 2. Flower – 40 points

**a. Color** (15 points). The color range of spuria iris is more limited than other types of iris. Basically whites, yellows, blues, lavenders, browns and approaches to red or pink are found. Yellow amoenas and browns, which are rather rare in other iris groups, are fairly common in the spuria iris. Improvements in the clarity of color and approaches to the colors of orange, pink, red or true blue should be considered favorably.

Many of the spuria flowers have strong signals of white or yellow on the falls. These can add distinction to the flower if the effect is clean and pleasing. Approaches to complete selfs, especially in whites or blues are also welcome, as these colors frequently have large yellow signals. In many cultivars the standards will be either brown, purple or blue and the falls dominated by a strong signal. This “dark top” effect can be especially pleasing and distinctive if the colors are well separated and contrasts are great. Many flowers have color applied smoothly but some of the more interesting flowers have patterns of striping that extend over both standards and/ or falls.

The fine texture of the flower may also affect the color. The velvety texture of a flower, especially for red and purple flowers, can effectively darken the color. Conversely a smooth texture accentuates the brilliance of bright yellows and golds.

Faults in color include muddy colors, bloom colors that fade to unattractive shades or where the signal and basic petal contrast in non-harmonious ways.

**b. Substance and Durability** (15 points). Spuria flowers have some of the most durable flowers of any iris, even rivaling the florist Dutch iris. A spuria flower should last a minimum of 3 days, even under the worst conditions. Flowers that last longer than that are to be encouraged.

**c. Form** (10 points). Spuria form has advanced greatly over the years. The spuria iris of our grandparents had erect, fairly narrow, standards. The falls had a long, extended claw area upon which the style laid flat. At the terminus of the fall proper, the fall widens to a rounded structure. The wide spacing of the petals gave rise to the term “butterfly iris” because this type of petal resembles butterfly wings. Although this form is pleasing, more recent spuria hybrids have much shorter claw areas. This has caused several changes. The decrease in claw length has forced the styles to be slightly raised from the falls (much as you would see in bearded iris) and the lamina area, the flat, leaf-like portion of the falls, has increased in size and breadth. Changes have also occurred in the standards, mostly with increasing width and decreasing length. The net effect of

these changes is a more compact flower. These changes, accompanied with increased ruffles and approaches to lace, have made for more modern-looking flowers that rival the other beardless iris classes.

It should be noted, however, that the traditional forms are also effective. For example, flowers with large and long dark standards contrasted against lighter falls will have an amazing visual effect.

Because of the large spathe leaves on the spuria stalk, some spuria cultivars have difficulty opening properly and can open with severely twisted petals. Similarly, cultivars that have elongated standards often twist the standards into unattractive shapes. These form defects, along with any tucking or pinching of the petal should be considered major faults.

The claws, not unlike the haft area in bearded iris, can be too elongated, thus holding the fall too far from the center of the flower for good proportion. The shorter claw usually gives the best overall flower form.



A typical Spuria stalk.

New developments in form. Flower on the left exhibits "flat" form. That on right displays ruffling.

### 3. Plant - 35 points

**a. Stalk and Foliage** (15 points). Most spuria hybrids have rather tall and very erect stalks. Stalks that lean or fall over should be heavily penalized. Several hybridizers are working on shorter spuria iris and these should be encouraged to increase the usefulness of spuria iris in smaller garden situations.

Spuria stalks have extensive spathe leaves from which the branches and flowers must traverse in order to display the flower. The flowers at all positions on the stalk should open easily with no odd corkscrewing of the flower. This is a severe fault that is often noted in cultivars related to *Iris orientalis*.

The bud count on spuria cultivars varies tremendously by climate. Although a cultivar might have 6 buds in the desert Southwest of the US, that same cultivar might have 4 buds in Oregon. Because of this variability, judges should be familiar with spuria bud count and branching typically found in the area. Many cultivars coming to the market now have 6 to 7 buds and there have been cultivars with as many as 14. When higher numbers of flowers are found on a stalk, the flowers should open at reasonable intervals so that a crowded mass of flowers is not produced.

**b. Floriferousness** (10 points). A floriferous variety will produce many blooms over an extended period of time. Multiple open blooms per stalk, while visually impressive, will almost always significantly shorten the length of bloom period compared to those varieties that open fewer blooms at once. It is desirable for each stalk to possess at least two buds in its terminal and have two buds in some of its branches. A good spuria iris should have 2 to 3 branches with at least 4 buds per stalk. It would be more desirable to have 5 to 7 buds and exceptional to have even more. The goal is to produce adequate and effective color display for at least two weeks.

**c. Stamina and Vigor** (10 points). A good spuria cultivar should produce at least two increases per rhizome per year to increase the size of the clump and produce a good display of bloom each season. Because spuria iris are left in one place for years, they should continue to produce adequate bloom. Because of variations in climate response, the judge should have some knowledge of typical growth of spuria iris in their area in order to properly assess a cultivar.

Spuria iris are prone to virus. Virus symptoms include light to clear streaks on the flowers or very dark streaks on some of the paler cultivars. Foliage will often have lighter streaks of pale green to white when they have virus.

#### 4. Distinctiveness – 10 points

A spuria iris may have all the good qualities but be too similar to existing cultivars to qualify for any awards or represent no great advancement over already-introduced cultivars. Because of this a judge must have a good knowledge of what is considered state of the art in spuria iris. Distinction is not limited to flower attributes. Exceptional vigor and/or bud count can also add distinction.

### SUMMARY

A good spuria iris cultivar should make an imposing mass of foliage that is erect and green and not marred by any virus symptoms. The stalks should be straight and rise far enough above the foliage mound so that all flowers on the stalk are above the leaves and the branches to allow all flowers open properly. The flowers of modern spuria cultivars are mostly of the compact flower form and exhibit ruffling or lace. Other forms are also acceptable as long as the flowers are well formed and keep their shape. Four buds are acceptable in cooler climates. However, in a warmer climate, there should be more buds on each stalk.

A new cultivar should represent a distinct improvement in flower color or form or some aspect of plant performance.

A judge may never see a cultivar worthy of the full 100 points. However, one must continue to search for beauty and the ultimate of perfection. The cultivar earning the highest score should reap the greatest harvest of awards.

## EXHIBITION JUDGING

### Horticultural Entries of Spuria 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.

Spuria flowers are ideal cut flowers and, as a consequence, should appear fresh and unmarred when exhibited. Ben Hager, when teaching judges training on spuria iris, would carry a load of spuria stalks into the room, pretend to trip, and throw all the stalks on the floor. The crowd would react and then Ben would show that the spuria flowers were just fine! They are very tough.

Because many judges are not familiar with a wide range of cultivars, it is important that the cultivar being judged is in fact the cultivar listed on the card. The most recent edition of the illustrated checklist produced by the Spuria Iris Society, shows pictures and written descriptions of virtually all the cultivars that have been marketed in North America and allows the judge to determine if the cultivar is labeled correctly.

Because many of the iris shows are at the tall bearded rather than spuria peak, most spuria entries to these shows will only have one flower open. Such a stalk should not be penalized for having only one open flower. Spuria stalks are, in general, very tall. If the show entries are on a table, it is very appropriate for the judges to ask the clerk to move the vase to the floor so that the fine points of the flower might be observed.

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 Spuria Iris

1. Cultural Perfection			75
	a. Flower	40	
	b. Stalk	35	
2. Condition & Grooming			25
TOTAL			100

#### 1. Cultural Perfection - 75 points

**a. Flower** (40 points). The flower must be fresh without the slightest indication of aging. There should be good, clear color supported by adequate substance. Form must be typical of the variety, and the blossoms should be of size that is normal or larger than normal for the variety. The spuria flower must have color typical of that cultivar with at least one flower fully opened. Size of the flower should be either typical or greater than the cultivar. No evidence of fading or unevenness should be present. The question the judge should ask is “Is this the best example of the flower of this cultivar that I have seen?”

**b. Stalk** (35 points). The spuria stalk should be typical of that cultivar. Although a spuria stalk might look better in the vase if a length of the stem is cut, the entire length of stem should be on display. Any stem that has been shortened for presentation should be penalized severely. For judges more familiar with bearded iris, the spuria stem with its large spathe leaves may seem abnormal. In many cultivars the spathe leaves will extend slightly into the terminal flower; this is not a fault. The spathe leaves should be clean and not marred by any symptoms of virus (general lighter streaks of color) or from mechanical damage.

Judging the bud count on the spuria stem with only a single terminal bloom is difficult. Sometimes, placing the vase on the floor and looking directly down upon the stalk can assist in making an accurate bud count. Expansion of the spathe leaves away from the stem is a clue that buds are underneath these leaves. It is entirely unacceptable to touch the stem to check bud count. Because bud count is variable in different climates, the judge should be aware of typical bud counts in the area and what a particular cultivar might have.

Buds below the terminal often have problems in opening properly or open at an odd angle. This would be considered a fault, especially if the flowers are displayed at odd or unattractive angles.

## 2. Condition & Grooming - 25 points

The skills of the exhibitor are evaluated here. The specimen should reflect visible improvement in the flower and stem resulting from the exhibitor's grooming. This includes neat removal of diseased or damaged foliage; cleanliness of the stem and flower; absence of insect infestations; firm upright positioning of the specimen; facing of the specimen; and a neat removal of spent blossoms, including the ovaries, with no damage to the spathes. The result should be a specimen being presented in its best possible appearance.

A judge may encounter trickery such as pinning or taping of flower parts, flower replacement from another stem, splicing of stems, unattached leaves or leaf spathes, cracking of stems to make them appear straighter, or hidden supports and wedges. If any such alterations are found, the entry is to be disqualified from competition.

Spuria iris have large nectaries at the base of the flowers that attract a variety of insects. Frequently aphids, bees or wasps, ants and ladybugs may be seen at these sites in the garden. Spuria stalks that have not been groomed sufficiently will often have these insects in these areas. A couple of insects might be tolerated because they often hide in the spathe leaves. However, the presence of insects should be at an absolute minimum for any specimen meriting a blue ribbon.

When more than one flower occurs on a stem, the exhibitor may aid the display of the flowers by gently positioning the flowers or by gently positioning spathe leaves so that each flower is in a good position and to prevent crowding. Stalks with a corsage sort of bloom display can be made especially attractive by this sort of gentle rearrangement.

## EXHIBITION JUDGING Spuria Iris Seedlings

In judging seedling classes, judges should remember that they are not seeking a superior horticultural specimen as defined in horticultural judging. Rather, they are judging 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 if no entry is worthy. Exhibition Certificates are also awarded to seedlings that receive votes from at least five judges on special seedling ballots in a calendar year at AIS approved shows. Judges visiting a show are urged to review the seedling entries and use these ballots to reward excellence where they find it.

To properly evaluate spuria seedlings the judge must have a good knowledge of the present state of the art of the spuria flower. A flower may be beautiful but too similar to existing cultivars to merit any award. Forms have advanced recently so that a more compact form is more the norm for new introductions than the widely separated butterfly form typical of the earlier spuria introductions.

Flowers with novel colors, improvements in color or pattern, more extensive ruffling or lace, or with an exceptional branching pattern should be considered favorably and considered for an exhibition certificate.

### SCALE OF POINTS Exhibition Judging of Spuria Iris Seedlings

1. Flower			75
	a. Color & Pattern	25	
	b. Form	25	
	c. Beauty & Distinction	25	
2. Stalk & Branching			25
TOTAL			100