

Chapter 23

BULBOUS IRIS

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Bulbous irises grow from autumn-planted bulbs, similar to tulips, daffodils, and hyacinths, not from rhizomes. Bulbous irises are divided into four groups: Reticulata, Scorpiris (the Juno iris), *Iris tuberosa* (formerly *Hermodactyl tuberosa*), and Xiphium.

Reticulata group: Among the earliest of spring blooming plants, these would rarely be encountered at show time.

Scorpiris (Juno iris): Because their bloom season overlaps with median, arilbred, and early tall bearded irises, the Scorpiris irises might be seen on the show bench. Unfortunately, they are not widely grown.

***Iris tuberosa*:** This is a single species which was formerly called *Hermodactylus tuberosa*. It was classified as a *Hermodactylus* because its ovary (where seeds form) has just one chamber rather than three, like all other irises. Recently it was reclassified as a true iris and its name changed to *Iris tuberosa*. In bulb catalogs it may still be found as *Hermodactylus*. The most distinguishing characteristic is that its flower has green standards and velvety black falls. Because of this, it has been called the Widow Iris or Snakeshead Iris.

Xiphium group: The Dutch and Spanish bulbous irises have considerable overlap with the bloom season of the early tall bearded iris. Thus, they are the bulbous types most likely to be encountered on the show bench. Also, in the Xiphium group are the English bulbous irises, which bloom extremely late, even overlapping the Japanese iris bloom season. Due to their late bloom season and limited use, the English bulbous irises would be encountered only at late season shows geared for beardless bloom.

The registration of bulbous iris is handled by the Royal General Bulb Growers' Association in the Netherlands and is abbreviated KAVB in Dutch. The AIS Board of

Directors has ruled that, because bulbous irises are not AIS registered varieties, there is no garden judging of bulbous irises and they are not eligible for top show awards such as Best Specimen of Show. However, bulbous irises are eligible for lesser show awards. They brighten the show bench and expand the variety of cultivars on display. Their entry in shows should be encouraged.

SHOW SCHEDULE

In past decades, the Dutch and Spanish hybrids were segregated by size and blooming period. The Dutch iris are somewhat larger in size and typically bloom earlier while the Spanish iris are smaller and bloom about two weeks later. Today, with many hybrids of all sizes, it would be another challenge for the show committee to try to create sections for these irises based on size and blooming period.

Depending on what is grown locally, a single section in the show schedule for bulbous irises might suffice. However, if there are many entries, it might be preferable to have the Spanish or Dutch iris further divided by color groups with the addition to the show schedule of a group for Other Bulbous Types. If no other section is available, these irises could be included in the species, species-crosses or miscellaneous section.

Single stems of the Spanish or Dutch iris make attractive show entries. If competition warrants, additional classes for a collection of three of a kind should be considered. Because of the diminutive size of the Reticulatas and many of the Scorpiris iris, three of a kind would be preferable. However, to display variety on the show bench, one of a kind is better than nothing.

EXHIBITION JUDGING

Bulbous Irises

Prior to the creation of the AIS Iris Encyclopedia (the wiki), judges may have found it difficult to verify the names of iris registered by the KAVB. (Koninklijke Algemeene Verenniging Voor Bloembollencultuur or KAVB is the international registry for the genera of *Tulipa*, *Hippeastrum*, *Hyacinthus*, bulbous irises, *Crocus* and *Muscari*). Now ALL extant bulbous iris are included in the wiki and can be found by searching their cultivar name through species or if a hybrid, through SPEC-X. Historic bulbous iris were registered with AIS up until 1950 and should be treated like any AIS registered iris.

Bulbous irises are NOT eligible for Best Specimen of Show.

Exhibition judging of irises 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 judgment 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.

Since Dutch or Spanish irises will represent the majority of bulbous entries, the following points apply specifically to them in exhibition judging.

SCALE OF POINTS Dutch & Spanish Bulbous Iris

1. Cultural Perfection					75
	a. Stalk			15	
	b. Foliage			10	
	c. Flower			50	
		i. Color	15		
		ii. Proportion	15		
		iii. Size	10		
		iv. Substance & Texture	10		
2. Condition & Grooming					25
TOTAL					100

1. Cultural Perfection - 75 points

a. Stalk (15 points). Stalks should be straight. In almost all cultivars, there will be a total of two buds at the top of the stem. If branching and further bud placement are evident, as in some of the Spanish irises, there should be no confusion of flowers due to

crowding. Stems should be cut to a sufficient length for giving a pleasing display on the bench.

b. Foliage (10 points). The foliage should be typical for the variety including length, substance and color. The leaves should be clean and free from insect or snail damage or disfigurement due to virus infection. It is typical for the foliage to end in a dry, brown tip. However, if the browning is noticeable and distracting, it is best to groom the foliage by clipping it neatly and at a natural angle. Excessively browned tips or obtrusively clipped foliage should be penalized.

c. Flower (50 points). Except in rare instances of appropriate branching, there should be but one flower open on a stalk. The flower should be held in a vertical position, not veering off at an angle. Colors may be clear and bright or may be muted and blended, but there should be no flecking. Specimens with extreme flecking, a manifestation of virus infection, should be disqualified.

Flower form and size should be typical of the variety, but particular emphasis should be placed on the regularity of the blossom. The falls should be equidistant from each other and they should be of the same size and shape. The same rule holds true for the style arms and particularly for the standards. It is quite common for one or more of the standards to catch on other floral parts while the bud is opening, keeping the standard from assuming its position mid-point between the falls. An experienced exhibitor will correct this fault by pulling free the standards in opening flowers prior to the day of picking.

The presence of a well developed second bud should be assessed. This second bud expands as the first flower ages, indicating that the open bloom is not a fresh one. Also, crowding by the second bud will tend to destroy the regular placement of the falls on the open flower.

If the second flower is the one in bloom, the first flower should have been removed in such a way as to be unnoticeable. Also, unless the first flower was removed early enough, the second flower would tend to develop at an angle due to crowding.

Multiple Stalks. If the show schedule calls for more than one stalk per entry, particular attention should be paid to uniformity of stem height, flower form and size, etc. The individual stalks should be as identical to each other as possible.

Other Points. Should the other bulbous types be encountered, keep in mind that *Reticulatas* have no stems. What appears to be a stem is a long perianth tube. English

irises are much more likely to show flecking and they have much thinner substance than the Spanish or Dutch irises. Scorpiris (Juno) iris vary from the diminutive stemless flower of *Iris persica* to the 24-inch (61 cm) stems of *Iris magnifica* which has flowers borne singly in the upper leaf axils. The standards of the Scorpiris (Juno) iris are very small and insignificant while the style arms may be quite large and showy.

Credit should be given to the exhibitor who can grow and exhibit these unique outer fragments of the iris rainbow, the lesser-known bulbous irises.

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.