

MINIATURE DWARF BEARDED IRIS

Garden Judging | Exhibition Judging | Seedling Judging

Approved by the AIS Board of Directors, May 11th, 2021

DEFINITION

Bearded iris up to 8 inches (20 cm) in height. Stems are usually unbranched; flowers are 1.6 to 3 inches (4 to 7.5 cm) wide; the earliest blooming of all bearded iris and with pure *Iris pumila* usually the first to bloom. Early bloom is a very desirable trait in the MDB class as it helps define the class.




Growth habits of *I. pumila*

Iris pumila is the most important species in the background of modern miniature dwarf bearded (MDB) iris. Most varieties are one-half to three-quarters *I. pumila*, and MDB iris of purely *I. pumila* origin are nearly a class in themselves. The balance of the parentage in hybrid miniature dwarf bearded iris is sometimes complex, deriving from several possible parental types including tetraploid tall or border bearded iris, the 40-chromosome complex of species now classified as *I. lutescens* (in some older cultivars), and occasionally from *I. aphylla*.





'Rivulet (MDB 2011)  Kevin Vaughn

GARDEN JUDGING

Introduced Varieties and Seedlings of MDB Iris

Miniature dwarf bearded (MDB) iris should have small and dainty flowers, with flowers and stems being in proportion to the overall plant. The great diversity in the background of MDB iris causes a relatively wide range of height in this class. A variety which occasionally produces a stem above the class height limit may be acceptable if the bloom size and other characteristics are those of the MDB class. A variety purported to be an MDB but not conforming to the class should not receive a vote for an award, whatever its other qualities.

SCALE OF POINTS

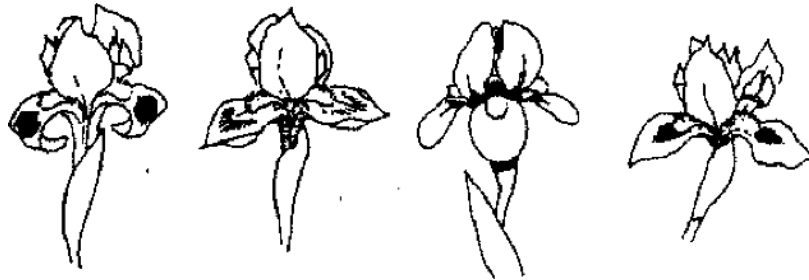
Garden Judging of Introduced and Seedling MDB Iris

1. Flower			40
	a. Color	20	
	b. Form	15	
	c. Substance & Texture	5	
2. Plant & Foliage			25
	a. Leaves & Stalk	10	
	b. Floriferousness	10	
	c. Vigor	5	
3. Overall Proportion			20
4. Distinctiveness			15
TOTAL			100

I. Flower – 40 points

a. Color (20 points). In judging, remember that color in a given variety can vary from season to season and from garden to garden. The spot pattern derived from *I. pumila* might be exceptionally sharp and clear in a particular year or garden but fuzzy and indistinct in another year or garden. The spot pattern can be a very sharply defined spot, a rayed spot, or a diffuse spot. Halos, divided spots or “wings”, and other variations on the spot must be a pleasing addition to the falls whether it is in a contrasting color or an intensified color on the falls. An overlay of another color should enhance the overall color effect and not appear muddy or smeared. Irregular streaking or blotching of a dark color, particularly noticeable on light colored flowers, tends to appear in cold, wet weather on varieties that are normally clear. Varieties that do not show such streaking or blotching when others do should be credited for this trait. Beard color can be very important to the overall effect. Matching or contrasting colors are preferable to indistinct ones. Style arm color can be another significant factor, especially in flowers with open standards that show off the style arms.

b. Form (15 points). Flaring or horizontal falls are more important on low growing plants than on the taller iris since flowers generally are viewed from above. *I. pumila* typically gives to its progeny one of two characteristic forms: falls that curl under or falls that flare out and roll to a point at the end. Falls that roll to a point at the end are sometimes called a star or lifting fall. Either of these fall forms is acceptable. The criterion is whether the color and pattern of the falls are displayed or hidden by the form. If the falls that curl under are relatively wide at the hafts and do not curl under too abruptly, they might display a large amount of color and pattern. Falls that roll to a point, if not extreme, might have a certain daintiness or reveal an interesting color contrast on the reverse of the falls, enhancing the general effect. Standards may be open or closed. Firmly held, open standards that reveal an interesting interior, such as matching or contrasting style arms, are as desirable as the classic domed standards. Beard form can also be a distinct attribute. Compact, bushy beards are preferable to thin, straggly ones.



The dainty flowers of the miniature dwarfs have striking color patterns and variations in form.

c. Substance and Texture (5 points). Substance should be crisp and firm. Weak or limp substance, besides being a fault in itself, will detract from the form. Texture can be silky, velvety, or waxy, but it should enhance the color effect and add that sparkle and style that separate the excellent from the ordinary. Although allocated few points, substance and texture can be a crucial influence on color and form.

2. Plant and foliage – 30 points

a. Leaves and stalk (10 points). Leaves should be neat and short, never taller than the flowers. Foliage is key to the proportion of the plant. Width of leaves should be proportional to that of other plant parts. Leaves should be measured midpoint between the top and the bottom of the leaf. Foliage on individual leaves should be less than 5/8 inches (1.6 cm) across with less than 1/2 inch (1.3 cm) being the preferred size for good proportion. Foliage any wider makes the plant look too coarse and out of proportion. Slender foliage is much more desirable. Plants with wider than 5/8 inches (1.6 cm) foliage should be penalized 5 points for leaves and stalk. While flowers with relatively narrow or dainty petals usually look best with narrow leaves, wider petaled flowers may look best with 5/8 inch (1.6 cm) leaves. The stalk of an MDB that is purely *I. pumila* typically will have an elongated perianth tube with the ovary directly on the rhizome. Other MDB iris will have stalks with varying proportions of stem to perianth tube. When branching occurs, it should not crowd or confuse the effect of the flowers in the clump. Stalks should be clean and slender with inconspicuous spathe valves.

b. Floriferousness (10 points). The number of blooms and duration of blooming are the factors to be considered here. Some varieties produce a huge mass of flowers lasting only a few days. Other varieties produce sparse bloom over several weeks, never making much of a show. Both should be faulted. A cultivar may produce many flowers as a result of having several stalks per rhizome as with *Iris pumila*, extra buds in a socket or branching as with many of the hybrid miniature dwarfs. Any of these scenarios can give a cultivar that produces many flowers. The goal is a cultivar that produces bloom preferably for two or more weeks.

c. Vigor (5 points). Miniature dwarfs vary considerably in vigor. While overabundant vigor and increase in a few varieties produces crowded clumps requiring division every year or two, lack of vigor is more often a problem. Varieties derived primarily from *Iris pumila* may not perform well in mild climates, whereas those derived primarily from SDBs may lack hardiness in colder climates. The ideal is a variety that does well in a wide range of climates. Those that do not should be penalized.



'Keeno' (MDB 2009)  Jeannette Graham


3. Overall Proportion – 20 points

Proportion is the relationship between the various plant parts, including petal width to flower size, standards to falls, flower size to plant height, plant size to leaf height, leaf width to petal width and rhizome size to overall plant size. Flowers that are proportionally too large for the plant are as out of scale as those that are too small. Flowers blooming down in the leaves have, among other faults, a serious problem of proportion in stem height to leaf height. Individual leaves wider than 5/8 inches (1.6 cm) warrant a 10 points deduction for being out of proportion. Absence of good overall proportion or being larger than the maximum limits should be severely penalized and precludes an out-of-proportion MDB receiving any awards. Daintiness is an essential quality of MDBs, and all plant dimensions must be scaled down proportionately to maintain a dainty appearance. While not actually visible, oversized rhizomes on small plants prohibit neat, compact clumps.

4. Distinctiveness – 15 points

A variety of MDB that is unique in some characteristic is preferred to one that is not. A variety which premieres a new color might have points deducted because of less than perfect form but gain a high score for distinctiveness. It is important here for the judge to be aware of the advances made in MDB breeding as well as in existing cultivars. Too many unique varieties are overlooked due to relatively minor faults, while less faulted commonplace varieties gain votes. A judge can recognize distinctiveness only by knowing what is available in the MDB class.



'Gecko Echo' (MDB 2008)  Jeannette Graham

EXHIBITION JUDGING

Horticultural Entries of MDB 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.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that exhibition judging of an introduced variety is judging the exhibit against the guidelines of perfection for that variety. There are no points for distinctiveness nor for the improved qualities that some varieties characteristically possess. Specimens atypical of the variety should be faulted however impressive in other respects. Do not be fooled by seasonal variations that typically affect many early blooming varieties. An obviously mislabeled variety, of course, cannot be judged.

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.

The following scale of points is for introduced MDB varieties exhibited as single stalks. Exhibition of miniature dwarfs as potted plants is permitted only if that is the way an approved show schedule is written. Otherwise, potted iris will be in an Educational Exhibit or "For Display Only."

SCALE OF POINTS

Exhibition Judging of Horticultural MDB Iris

1. Cultural Perfection					75
	a. Flower			35	
		i. Color	15		
		ii. Form	10		
		iii. Substance	10		
	b. Stalk			10	
	c. Proportion			10	
	d. Freedom from Damage			20	
2. Condition & Grooming					25
	a. Grooming			15	
	b. Age of Bloom			10	
TOTAL					100

1. Cultural Perfection - 75 points

a. Flower (35 points). In exhibition judging we are not considering comparative merits of different varieties. Color, form and substance should be as good as or superior to the variety's typical performance.

b. Stalk (10 points). The stalk should be clean and of typical height for the variety. If a leaf or spathe valve is included, it should be clean, healthy and attractive.

c. Proportion (10 points). Proportion in exhibition judging of introduced varieties again refers to the typical performance for that variety. Overgrown specimens with flowers too large for the variety or stems too long are more frequently encountered in MDB classes than are undergrown ones.

d. Freedom from Damage (20 points). Quality cultivation practices will result in specimens free of evident disease, insect infestation, water spots, frost damage or spray residue. Irregular dark streaks or blotches, most apparent on light varieties that have opened in cold and/or damp weather, should be penalized.

2. Grooming and Condition - 25 points

a. Grooming (15 points). The care with which a specimen has been handled and prepared for exhibit will be evident in freedom from torn, bruised or otherwise damaged petals. Staging, including propping the stalk in the container, will show a specimen to its best advantage and is a consideration in judging.

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.

b. Age of bloom (10 points). Flower freshness is particularly important for MDB specimens, since the usual single bloom should last through the entire show. The bloom should be sufficiently developed at the time of judging to show typical form of the mature blossom.

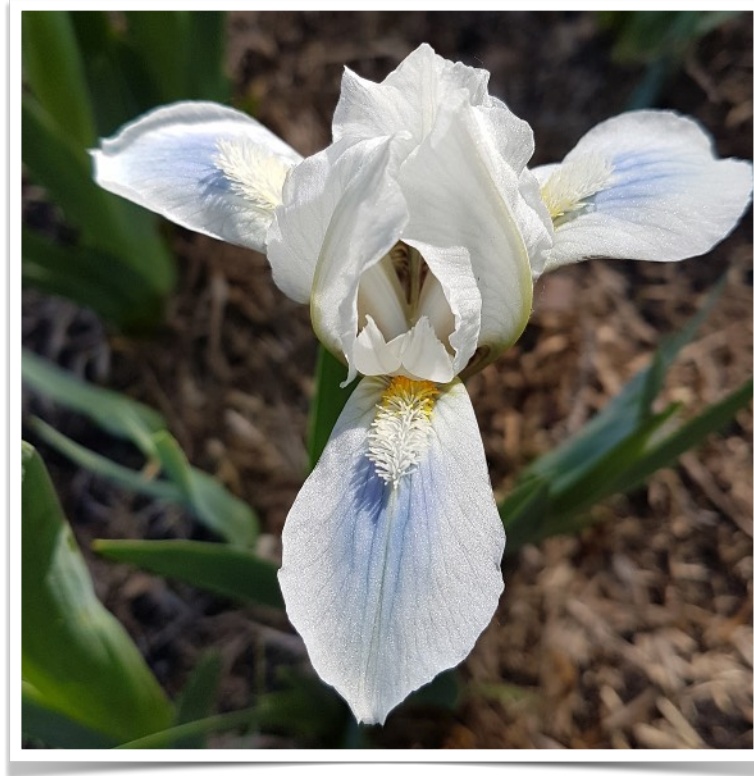
EXHIBITION JUDGING


MDB 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.

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 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.



'Flity Eyes' (MDB 1972)  Sandy Proulx

SCALE OF POINTS

Exhibition Judging of MDB Seedlings

1. Flower			55
	a. Color	25	
	b. Form	20	
	c. Substance & Texture	10	
2. Stalk			5
3. Proportion			15
4. Distinctiveness			25

TOTAL			100
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1. Flower (55 points). The flower becomes more important in the exhibition judging of seedlings than in other types of judging because it is all there is to evaluate on an MDB seedling specimen.

Characteristics of color, form, substance and texture discussed under garden judging are applicable here. Color should be considered with an awareness of the quality of available light. Artificial light may distort the true color of a seedling as it would appear in sunlight, enhancing or diminishing its effectiveness.

2. Stalk (5 points). There is little to evaluate on the stalk of an MDB seedling specimen. It should be within the class height limit and strong enough to support the bloom. The stalk should not be so thick or blunt as to detract from the daintiness expected of MDBs. Any branches or spathes should not detract.

3. Proportion (15 points). Proportion can only be evaluated on the relation of petal width to flower size, standards to falls and flower size to apparent stalk height. Any flower too large or stalk too tall should be penalized.

4. Distinctiveness (25 points). Distinctiveness is very important in exhibition judging of MDB seedlings since more of the uniqueness of a seedling is in its flower rather than its plant. The discussion of distinctiveness under garden judging is applicable to exhibition judging of MDB seedlings.

Handbook For Judges and Show Officials



Edition 8.0

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.
