

Judge for Yourself



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Useful publications:

The Iris - Brian Mathew

RHS Wisley Handbook-Irises - S. Linnegar & J. Hewitt

BIS Year Book (published each December)

BIS Handbooks: *Bearded Irises*

Beardless Irises

Water and Wetland Irises

Raising Irises from Seed

BIS Leaflet: *Reticulata Irises* - S. Linnegar

Judge for Yourself

This booklet is intended for people who wish to learn to judge irises and to exhibit them. The two situations should go hand in hand: it is as well to be able to judge your irises for suitability before you exhibit them and there is more to exhibiting an iris successfully than just taking a spike to a show and putting it in a vase of water. But the essentials of judging are the same for all plants whether in gardens, greenhouses or on the show bench. It is even worth while practising wherever plants are found though it may sometimes be wiser not to state the conclusion arrived at and so ruin a beautiful friendship. But it is useful if you visit the local horticultural show to inspect the prize winners carefully and try to work out why the judge made those awards. At the local Iris Show do exactly the same and if you are in doubt ask one of the judges to explain. Firstly, however, read the show schedule slowly and carefully and then decide exactly what is required for each exhibit: the awful symbol 'N.A.S' means that the exhibitor either didn't read the schedule properly or forgot the details.

It is reasonable to ask why we should want to judge irises at all and there seem to be three reasons: firstly, we want to know which are likely to be the best plants for our gardens; secondly, gardeners put a lot of work into producing good plants and like to have their labours rewarded; thirdly, some people just like to win prizes.

That leaves us with a number of judging situations and a large number of irises which, at first sight, can't really be compared. It needs to be remembered that iris breeding has resulted in enormous changes in the quality of plants during the last century. Elderly people come up to members of the BIS at shows and say that the irises of today are not as good as the ones of old; sadly, it is not the irises they are mourning, but the passing of their lives. The greatest change was the introduction of the first tetraploid tall bearded cultivars between 1919 and 1939 followed by tetraploid forms of other irises since the 1950s. This is not the place for botanical explanations, but generally speaking a tetraploid form

of a plant will give much richer substance to the flowers, possibly more of them, wider and longer leaves and larger plants. However, some diploids, particularly in the Siberian group can be just as impressive as the tetraploids. Meanwhile, all plants fall into two groups: the survivors and the rest. Most of the old cultivars have disappeared and in due time those of the present irises which are not survivors will also join their predecessors on the compost heap. It is many years of cultivation and, above all, neglect which separate out the best plants.

In the garden and greenhouse

In the first place, irises need to be grown. So basic judging means considering a plant in the garden or greenhouse. It must be a reasonably good grower in most situations. That is to say it should not romp all over the flower bed and nor should it make very poor growth. The rule of thumb for replanting all herbaceous plants is every three years and both bearded, beardless and bulbous irises are included. The bulbous irises need to produce additional bulbs in reasonable numbers. The plant and leaves have to be healthy; anything showing signs of insect or virus infestation has to be marked down although this indicates poor cultivation rather than a poor plant.

When the flowering season is under way it is necessary to consider whether the plant, or group of bulbs, has a reasonable number of flower spikes for its size. Too few spikes give a poor effect while too many mean that you can't see the individual flowers for the mass of them. And most of the flowers should stand clear of the tops of the leaves so that you get the full benefit of their shapes and colours. Where a spike carries a large number of individual flowers (for a tall bearded iris there may be anything up to a dozen) they have to be spaced elegantly on the stem and flower over time so that you can enjoy the individual blooms because the last thing you want is a whole mass of flowers out together and lasting for a very short time. Even when a spike naturally only carries two flowers, it is still preferable that they should come one after the other, though a heatwave may cause them to speed up and can be taken into consideration when marking.

Assuming that the distribution of the flowers is satisfactory, do the flowering spikes stand up well through the flowering season?

Many a glorious looking plant has had to be scrapped because the spike fell down on the job. In general, it should not be necessary to stake irises unless they are in an exceptionally windy area.

There are single flowered irises and for them, as well as for all the multi-flowered ones, the quality of the actual flower is of great importance. It has to look well through whatever the weather can throw at it. Through pouring rain with high winds, blazing sun and a steady breeze, or hot and humid conditions that flower needs to look good for between four and seven days according to its type and substance and the buds that open after it should look well, too.

Difficulties can arise when species, or wild forms, have to be judged. Some, the greenhouse types mostly, are splendid in their own right while the garden forms can look rather poorly beside a modern cultivar mainly because the texture of the flowers is much thinner and not so weather resistant. Once this is accepted the principles remain the same and it may well be that the species clump is better grown than the cultivar. The same difficulty may arise if old fashioned irises are met with because their flower texture is not as good as that of the modern cultivars.

A number of new beardless hybrids are appearing in gardens, but there is no reason for these to give rise to difficulties. The usual standards apply whether or not it is a case of the best clump to win an award or whether, as at Wisley, the clump can be given an award in its own right because it is being judged against a standard and not against neighbouring plants.

The Show Bench

The same main requirements apply here as in the garden with the proviso that the spikes will receive much closer inspection and little things that might not be noticed in the garden will detract seriously from the prize-winning potential on the show bench. This is one of the rare occasions when an exhibitor may want to stake spikes to reduce risk of wind damage before a show. Hail can be disastrous, but rain should not do much damage unless it is prolonged when sodden flowers should be discarded. Similarly, dead or dying flowers should have been removed and torn spathes carefully smoothed back into position to give a natural appearance or even trimmed away in a real emergency.

So the spike should be as nearly perfect as possible and it is



going to be compared directly with others that are just as good. One of the most important things is what is known as 'staging': the placing of the spike or spikes in the vases. They usually need to be wedged with paper, moss or other materials so that they stand upright in the vase if there is only one spike. If there are more, then they must be wedged so that each spike can easily be separated from its companions, but not so widely that they get mixed up with the neighbouring competitor. Where several spikes are used a better effect is achieved if they are slightly different lengths with the tallest at the back and slightly shorter ones to the front. Similarly, the iris should have its best face forward to the judges. If there is a slight blemish, and often this is unavoidable, then it should be camouflaged as far as possible by being turned to the back of the exhibit. After all, the aim and object of the exercise is to make the best impression possible and where there is little to choose between two exhibits the one which is best presented will gain the award. Where foliage is included, and it usually should be, damaged leaf tips should be trimmed and any unsightly leaves removed completely. Staging is a branch of flower arranging and exhibitors and judges forget it at their peril. The stem should be as nearly straight as possible, the leaves in good condition, some of the flowers fully open and nicely displayed on the stem. Preferably the first flower at the top of the spike should be open, though a good bud can be acceptable, and up to three or four more, depending on the type of iris, should support it. At least one flower must be fully open. The outline of the spike and flowers for branched irises should be triangular and the degree of elongation will depend on the type of iris. What must not be accepted is a spike with 'top branching' where the flowers tend to clump at the top of the stem and a spike where the flowers are so widely spaced that it looks 'leggy' should be down pointed.

Where plants are exhibited in pots or pans as may be the case with *Reticulata* irises, for instance, these should be clean. The soil surface should either look nice and fresh or be covered with sand or gravel for a smart appearance. A messy appearance should definitely be marked down.

Whether you are exhibiting or judging, read the show schedule carefully. It is very disheartening to find a perfect exhibit clearly labelled 'Not as schedule'. And there is another little matter: containers provided for the show are not always in pristine condition

so they should be polished up or the exhibitor risks losing points for this.

Judging Multiple Exhibit Classes

These are really no different from single spike classes except that there may be, say, six spikes in four or more colours. Try elimination in the first place if there are several exhibitors. One or two will not be up to scratch and you need pay no more attention to them. Then see if you think one exhibit is outstandingly good after which you check very carefully that no hidden flaws mar the perfection. The same will apply to the other exhibits still in the running. Naturally in a class of this sort the exhibit with the widest range of colours notches up extra marks: if the exhibitor has had to use an older type of iris this should not necessarily down-grade the exhibit because a good specimen of an older type is better than a poor novelty. It is quite common for an apparent winner to come second or third when the judges discover that it has flaws while another has a clear run of perfect spikes. The same principles apply when the multiple exhibit has several vases with several spikes in each of them.

Panic can initially set in when an inexperienced judge faces a class of species (or wild forms) of irises partly because they are so very different from the modern cultivars. Yet again, though, the same principles apply whether it is a mixed class of single spikes or a mixed class of mixed species or, come to that, a mixed class of a single species. Are the spikes and foliage in good condition? The real point here is whether or not they have been well grown and staged.

Judging Mixed Iris Types

There are classes for species, or wild forms, where exhibitors are given the chance of collecting as many different types of irises as possible from their gardens. Space permitting, they will be staged in separate vases for each species, but for something like the species Siberians or Pacific Coast irises there may be several different species in a vase. In practice this is really no different from judging a class of several Tall Bearded irises in different colours. The basic requirements are all the same except for one: the judge simply may not know whether or not the alleged species are true ones or not. All judges should have a working knowledge of



RIGHT



WRONG

the appearance of the various species they are likely to meet and there are several useful books which should be consulted; there is no need to know how to grow them. All things being equal, the exhibitor with the best grown and rarest will win. At an Iris Show there should be someone around who can vouch that the species is a true one, but at a non-specialist show this may not be the case and the judge must accept the attribution, but the show secretary in attendance should be told of any doubts. Mislabelling does occur in spite of the best intentions and collected forms are often misidentified in the field. Even so, provided the plant has been well grown and is in good show condition it deserves an award provided it complies with the schedule.

The New Inter- and Intra-specific Hybrids

These are appearing on the benches, in some gardens and usually have classes to themselves, but in some instances they will be combined with whichever of the parent types of iris happens to be in flower at the same time. There can be a real problem if this last instance is the case because sometimes there is a considerable difference between the number of flowers carried by the hybrid and true form. In general, though, the standard conditions still apply.

Serious Judging of the Individual Iris Groups

The preceding remarks are applicable to all irises, but there are specific matters for an active judge to consider since at first sight a Pacific Coast Iris, for instance, may not seem comparable with a Tall Bearded. We have included a system for allocating points to the irises in the main groups which may be helpful. It is well worth using this system until you have confidence in your ability to judge an iris and that other judges will accept your opinion.

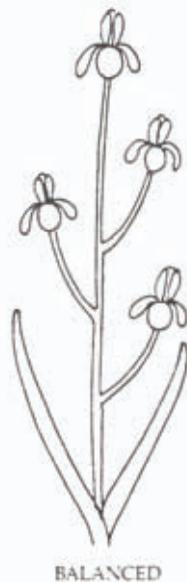
The Bearded Irises

There are three main groups of these: Tall Bearded, Intermediate Bearded and Standard Dwarf Bearded Irises.

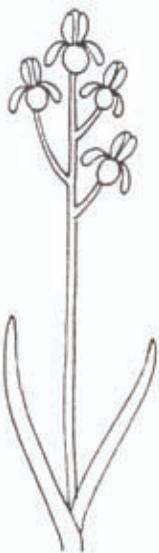
Tall Bearded Irises

THE PLANT (35 points) should not be expected to increase unreasonably. A comparison of the plants in your garden will show the standard your plants can reach. The top 10% should have the

highest marks and the others be graded in relation to those. The foliage should be healthy and can be differently coloured at the base of the leaves. Leaves should not be too broad, floppy or virus streaked. Diseases can obviously detract from the appearance of foliage and should always be looked for in the form of rot, scorch, leaf spot or rust. **STEM** (15 points). The sole purpose of the stem is to display the flowers to maximum advantage and carry any seed pods to full ripeness. There should be a minimum of seven buds; more are an advantage providing they open in sequence and never two at once in the same spathe. The stem should be branched so that flowers are carried clear of the main stem and of each other. The branches should not be crowded at the top of the stem and, ideally, should have equal spacing with elegant side positioning. Stems should be neither so thin that they collapse if flowers become waterlogged, nor so thick that they are conspicuous; they should be self-supporting though staking in exposed positions to prevent damage is acceptable. Some spikes may carry a secondary stem from the base of the main one: it should be held sufficiently clear of the main stem and foliage to allow the individual flowers to be seen properly. Finally, the stem should carry the flowers clear of the leaf tips; dwarfed stems are not acceptable. **FLOWER** (30 points total): **FORM** (10 points). The standards should be arched and, preferably, just touching at the tips. If they are stiff enough a small gap is permissible, but they should never slope outwards. The falls should be broad and rounded with short hafts. They should have a good flare, but not be actually horizontal let alone tilted upwards. The petals may be ruffled or lace-edged, but not to such an extent that they spoil the shape of the flower. All should be in proportion so that the effect is neither top-heavy nor cup-and-saucer shaped. Horns need only be considered if the flower is a first class shape without them; they may then add to or detract from the form. **SUBSTANCE** (10 points). The flower must stand up to wind, rain and hot sun and in the standards this demands a stiff centre rib while the substance of the falls should be strong enough to hold their shape during the life of the flower. If the falls crack across in windy weather this indicates that they are too brittle; there must be some degree of pliability. Texture should be judged as part of colour, but it will probably affect substance as well. **COLOUR** (10 points). Judges must beware of personal preferences here:



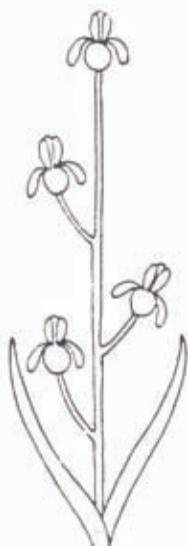
the criterion is 'is it good of its kind?' All colours have their supporters, but we should not dismiss blends or subtle colours. Colours should be clear, clean and reasonably intense; excessive fading should be penalised. Coarse veining on the hafts is a serious fault, but delicate veining which forms a definite pattern is acceptable. A colour which stands out at a distance is admirable, but soft blends or plicatas which need close inspection to reveal their beauty should not be down-pointed. Texture comes into colour judgement as silky, velvety and cottony finishes give different qualities. 'Teardrop' blemishes, flecking, or frost produced water-marks severely affect colour quality. PRESENTATION (20 points). This combines the factors already discussed. The key element is proportion: each factor must complement the others. The flower size must be suitable to that of the plant; the plant must be well covered with flowers, but not so that they crowd each other; the flowers should be held well clear of the leaves and the bloom season should be as long as possible after which the flower should die neatly without obstructing the opening buds. The stems, flowers and foliage particularly must make a harmonious whole with enough, but not too much space between leaves and flowers, stems standing up - not lying down or at odd angles. It is possible for spikes to be overcrowded which leads to damage from winds. It is perfectly possible for a plant to score highly on its parts and still be aesthetically unpleasing and, of course, for the reverse to happen.



TOP BRANCHED

Intermediate Bearded

40-71cm (16-28"). There are two types in this section: the first is like a rather over-tall SDB which flowers soon after the SDBs and the criteria for that group should be used, but the flowers should be larger so that they are in proportion to the taller stems; if too tall they appear 'leggy' and in need of branches. Indeed the maximum height for this group should be 40-45cm (16-18"). The second group is 45-71 cm (18-28") and judging is as for TBs, but modified by SDB criteria to allow for the smaller size and staking should not be needed. PLANT (35 points). Allow for the smaller scale. STEM (15 points). Not too slender, or too thick and carrying at least two branches with at least four and preferably more flowers. The branches should be so placed that the flowers do not get lost in the foliage or get bunched at the top. The flowers should be



LEGGY

carried clear of the stem and each other. FLOWER (30 points). Flowers should be in proportion to stem height and neither too small nor too large. FORM (10 points). Standards should be nearly closed and the falls fairly flaring. Open standards are less acceptable and flare can be a little less than on the taller stem. SUBSTANCE (10 points). Strong petals are required to support the flower size. COLOUR (10 points). Blends seem to be more acceptable here, but plicatas need strong marking to be visible. PRESENTATION (20 points). It is necessary to guard against the clump effect produced by multiple stems. Long-lasting and neat dying flowers are of great importance and flowers should open in a succession of 1,2,2. Slender, short leaves are advantageous.

Miniature Tall Bearded

40-71 cm (16-28"). These are like TB irises seen through a reducing lens. They flower at the same time as the TBs and should be judged by the same criteria allowing for the difference in overall size. The stem in particular, should be slender and flexuous and the flowers smaller in size. It may appear over-tall for this size of the blooms, but should be graceful.

Border Bearded

40-71 cm (16-28"). These have larger flowers and stronger stems than the others and must be watched for over-large flowers and flower bunching. The foliage must not be too heavy and the flowers must be clear of it. Flaring falls are essential, but cup-shaped standards are acceptable within limits.

Standard Dwarf Bearded

23-40cm (9-15½"). PLANT (35 points). Judge as for TBs, but rapid increase is of extra importance and so is the scale of the foliage. STEM (15 points). This should hold the flowers clear of the leaves and should carry at least three flowers which should open in succession and die neatly. Flowers opening together on a spike should be penalised since this will shorten the season and makes the plant look cluttered. FLOWER (30 points). FORM (10 points). As for TBs, but with more emphasis on well flared flowers with a nicely rounded shape. Standards should have good substance so that their naturally slightly open stance adds to the appearance of the plant. SUBSTANCE (10 points). As for TBs, but COLOURS (10 points)

which do not stand out well need careful consideration as they may have real merit; *plicatas* in particular need to be distinct if they are to be seen. PRESENTATION (20 points). These plants must look sprightly and healthy: a dead centre implies poor cultivation and neglected replanting. As early bloomers they will start leafing up early in the year and must be an obviously healthy plant through until the autumn. At the height of their flowering time there is a tendency for flowering points to produce two spikes at the same time. This is not, in fact, a good thing since the flowers tend to grow into each other and produce a messy effect because they will open at the same time.

Irises *oncocyclus*, *regelia*, *hexapogon* and *pseudoregelia*.

These species are closely related to the pogons, but are rarely on show even on the bench. The flowers really need to be perfect and the stems vertical. They can be spectacular.

The Beardless Irises

In the following groups there are plants which accept and do well in most gardens and conditions. The few which need more moisture, or more warmth, or more shade than the majority in order to perform well will obviously lose marks during comparisons if they can't have them. In the interests of maintaining diversity these should, if possible, be kept in conditions which suit them. There are many people whose gardens do not face due south and who also have trees and shrubs.

Siberian Irises

This group contains both diploid ($2n = 28$) and tetraploid (the chromosome count is doubled) Siberians and Sino-Siberian hybrids ($2n = 40$); it also includes hybrids between these and other species somewhat resembling them in deciduous growth habits and flowering seasons. Heights may vary from 30-90cm (12-36"). PLANT (35 points). Criteria in general as for TBs, but the foliage is much finer, narrower and more grass-like. They should rapidly build up into a strong clump. STEM (15 points). This should be thin, but strong, not breaking in high winds; branching is desirable. Flowers should be carried above the foliage and there should be at least four buds. On the other hand there is still a very wide variety of plant types on offer in this group and a *sanguinea* type with a three budded terminal alone is acceptable as long as the flowers open in sequence; with the

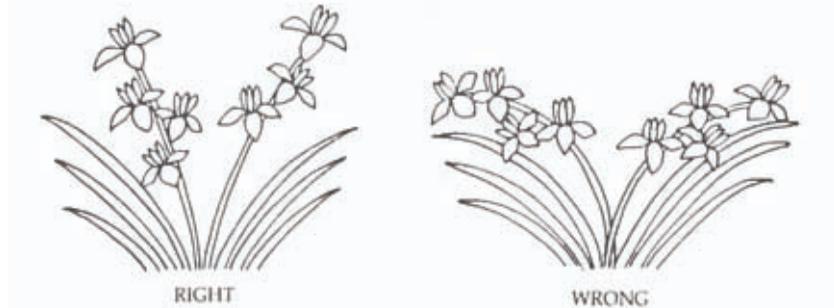
Chrysographes and other hybrids two flowers to a spike is adequate. Flowers should open in succession and die neatly. A prolonged flowering season is desirable even at the expense of mass flowering display. FLOWER (30 points). FORM (10 points). The falls can be flared or semi-flared, but should not turn upwards; they should have short hafts and relatively broad blades, but the essential matter is a pleasing relationship in sizes of the parts of the flower; they may be tailored, but if they are ruffled or waved this should not be excessive. The standards may meet at the tips, be upright or slope outwards (though this is less common in the Sino-Siberians), but must be strong and weather resistant. The whole should have a balanced appearance. There are new cultivars with the standards and falls in the same plane rather like a conventional *Ensata* iris and these require careful consideration, but are otherwise acceptable. The real point here is that we have a great range of flower shapes from which to select for various types of garden effect and it is important to retain them all. SUBSTANCE (10 points). This should be sufficient to hold the flower shape against the elements for several days, but not so rigid that the petals, or the whole flower, cannot move in the breeze. COLOUR (10 points). This should be clear, not muddy, but can be soft or strong; fading is a disadvantage. Falls may have strong haft marks or a sunburst pattern or be perfectly clean - all have their supporters. Some 40 chromosome cultivars have a *plicata* pattern which is interesting. Chrysographes hybrids need to keep the gold patterning. PRESENTATION (20 points). The balance and proportion of flowers to plant is all important, but flowers must top the foliage by a clear margin. Colour effect from a distance should be good before the flower details can be seen. Again, it should be emphasised that flowers should open in succession, not overlap each other and should die neatly so as not to impede new flowers.

There are a number of dwarf forms, particularly of the Siberians, and while the same standards of judging are required it should be remembered that they are naturally smaller plants and will not carry the same degree of branching.

I. prismatica (not a Siberian iris) is a very tricky plant. Its flowers are misleadingly similar to those of *I. sibirica* and you will read that the distinction between the two groups is that *I. prismatica* has a zig-zag stem. In actual fact it may have a straight or slightly wavy stem. The

only safe distinction is that *I. prismatica* has a wandering habit of growth. It is being extensively used in hybridising in America and though few plants have yet reached this country they will add confusion when they come.

Pacific Coast Irises



These irises are mainly hybrids of *I. douglasiana* (fairly tall, coarse leaves, several branches) and *I. innominata* (shortish, fine leaves and terminal flowers only) and share these characteristics according to their breeding. Neither characteristic should be given preference and, indeed, there have been immense changes over the last decade: the older cultivars tend to smaller flowers very similar to the original species while the new ones have far bigger flowers in brighter colours. Both forms have their place in gardens. PLANT (35 points). It should be vigorous and increase rapidly to form a compact clump with many stems. Foliage should be a good green, erect, not lax, coarse or too wide. A dead centre in a short time should be penalised, but must not be confused with the natural dead leaves which result from the plants being evergreen. Colour at the leaf bases is a plus and there should not be undue die-back of fans or leaves. These plants are evergreen and frost tenderness needs to be watched for. STEM (15 points). This should be erect and strong enough to hold the flowers above the leaves without falling over. Stems at an angle are not so good and may fall right down. Each stem should carry at least two terminal buds and more on the branches which should not be hidden in the foliage. Flowers should open in succession along the stem to give a long season. FLOWER (30 points). FORM (10 points). This is subject to wide variation, but long, strappy falls and weak standards are bad. Broad petals with good substance, short hafts and flare are looked for in the falls and strong standards can be domed, upright or outward sloping

provided they form a harmonious whole. It should be long-lasting. SUBSTANCE (10 points). Strong substance is needed to achieve good modern forms, but petals should be flexible enough not to snap in high winds. Rain damage should be penalised if neighbouring plants are unaffected. COLOUR (10 points). Do not allow personal preferences to sway your judgement. Colours should be clean, clear and intense. Dull and muddy colours and fading should be down-pointed. Veining can add or detract and should be marked according to effect. Sunburst patterns are usually good. PRESENTATION (20 points). The plant should present a harmonious whole with flowers held well above the foliage and neither too small nor too large in relation to stems and leaves. Length of season should be regarded and preference should not be given to 'flash in the pan' cultivars - a good show over a long-season should be the aim.

The Spuria Hybrids

These are amongst the tallest of the garden irises, usually ranging in height from 90-160cm (36-64"). However, some varieties, such as 'Shelford Giant' will grow even taller in good conditions and, conversely, several of the species flower at 30cm (12") or less. The majority of the current Spuria hybrids have been developed from the taller growing species. PLANT (35 points). These are not fast growing plants, but progress should be steady and the plant should be reasonably compact; the smaller forms may seem to have fans growing much closer together than the larger ones, but this is a matter of scale. Foliage is a dominant feature throughout the year and should be upright, usually gently arching at the top and of a good healthy colour. It should not droop, look untidy or show signs of disease. STEM (15 points). This should be stiff and upright. Branches should be spaced so that flowers can be seen separately as there is a natural tendency to have several flowers open at the same time, but there should only be one at a time from each spathe. The flowers should also be clear of the long stem leaf and the branches should hold them clear of the stem itself. The number of flowers to be expected on a spike has changed over the last few years: hybrids used to have four flowers, as do most of the species, but now a count of eight flowers is more usual; there are generally two to a spathe and certainly two at the terminal. The flowering

period will be at least a month. FLOWER (30 points). There is much diversity in form and size. The size of the flower should be in proportion to the size of the plant. FORM (10 points). Standards should be close to vertical and of reasonable width; the falls should have fairly wide hafts and broad blades and they should be flared; an underhung, or recurved fall will not do in a hybrid though it may be diagnostic of a species. A degree of ruffling is acceptable, but should not obscure the natural shape nor result in one flower overlapping another. SUBSTANCE (10 points). Spuras have naturally good quality flowers with firm texture and this needs to be maintained to keep flowers in good condition for several days. COLOUR (10 points). The ranges are widening every year and should be bright and clear while the surface may be waxy or velvety. The signal patch may be defined or diffuse, but is a conspicuous part of the pattern. PRESENTATION (20 points). A Spuria planting may remain undisturbed for many years (ten or more is not uncommon leading to clumps which are 90cm (36") across, or more). In general plants are disease resistant, but in light, or fast draining soils trouble may occur and it will be obvious. Because of the character and height of the leaves, the plant will have a marked impact on the garden throughout the growing season and so the clump should be neat and compact with the flower stems evenly distributed amongst the foliage. Varieties making a good garden effect, but bearing flowers which are not of top exhibition quality need not be marked down seriously on that account. These plants do not care for frequent replanting.

Ensata Irises

As the BIS has very limited experience with this group and still needs to establish its own criteria, judges are recommended to study the line drawings and photographs in *The Japanese Iris* by Dr. Currier McEwen. Japanese breeders and growers hold to rigid shapes for the different groups of these irises, but modern breeding has eliminated the old demarcation lines. PLANT (35 points). It should increase steadily in size for replanting every three or four years when grown on land. Leaves should be upright, clean and reasonably prolific and in proportion to the number of spikes. Judging here is similar to that of the Siberians and, of course, tetraploid plants will appear larger than

the diploids. Brown or black veining indicates the presence of thrips and should be marked down as they can be treated. Thrips are endemic in Britain and other forms may appear on imported plants. However, the foliage is close packed and possibly prone to fungus or rot in hot, humid weather. STEM (15 points). This should be straight and long enough to carry the flowers of the terminal and branches clear of the leaf tips. A second branch may well carry the flowers level with those of the first. It should be strong enough to carry the flowers through wind and rain, but not be obtrusively thick and should not require staking. Bud counts are very variable at present, but there should be two at the terminal and at least one branch with two buds. Since the flowers tend to be large and flat it is essential that they open serially and that branches can hold them clear of the main stem. FLOWER (30 points). There is a very wide variation in flower forms and sizes and in this group, where people tend to have strong personal opinions, it is most important that judges be dispassionate in their work. Unlike the TBs there is no notional standard at present with which to compare a cultivar (and the same applies at present to the *Laevigatas* which have similar flower shapes). Like the Siberians, we should try to preserve the present variations in shape. FORM (10 points). The flower may have upright, angled or depressed standards; it may have only three falls or it may appear to have dozens of petals. There may be conventional style arms and stamens or they may all be petaloid. The point to decide is whether the combination is satisfactory in itself: do the upright standards balance the falls? Do the flattened petals provide an attractive flower or is the whole thing a muddle? SUBSTANCE (10 points). The petals must have sufficient substance to withstand a cold, rainy summer and still make a show. Any flower which looks like a wet rag after rain should be marked down. If flowers wilt badly in hot weather this may be due to water shortage and marking should be postponed, but if this is a regular occurrence the plant should be marked down. COLOUR (10 points). Patterns are as variable as in bearded irises, but less easy to classify because of the variations in flower shape. They must be considered in relation to the petal arrangement and should be aesthetically satisfactory, not just a mish-mash. Fading is not good and should be marked down though again allowance must be made for a very hot, sunny season as these tend to be late season plants. PRESENTATION (20 points). Does the

plant, whether in a bed, a pond or a container make a good garden effect? These rather flat flowers mostly need to be seen from above. Many of the new cultivars are rebloomers or remontants so the quality of the secondary show needs to be considered and it must be remembered that these plants will increase more rapidly in area. Dwarf forms are being introduced and while the same standards of judging are required it should be remembered that they are naturally smaller plants and will not carry the same degree of branching. Similarly, much taller forms with multiple branching are appearing and, allowing for the difference in flower shape, must be judged by TB standards. Judges should remember the lines by Rudyard Kipling:

"There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays,
And-every-single-one-of-them-is-right."

The parts are greater than the whole?

It can happen in judging plants by the points system. When you come to compare the scores you may feel surprise that a plant which you don't think is good enough appears to have a higher score than a really good one. Try and work out why you have got this result, but an unsatisfactory plant can have good parts and may provide a splendid spike for the show bench while having insufficient spikes to make a good impression in the garden, and the spike marks may outweigh the loss on other parts. In time as you gain experience you will be able to dispense with the arithmetic, but it does pay to keep notes of your judgements on the plants you see and these should cover the main headings above. In the early stages it also pays to keep this year's marks to compare with next year's. Weather does affect performance and some plants are not happy in some gardens. If other judges have the same result, that plant will not be given a garden award.

There are a number of irises which while appearing at shows and growing in gardens are not yet subject to intensive breeding. We have not provided the same numerical judging indications for them, but you should rate them in exactly the same way if you are interested in these plants whether you are in the show hall or the garden.

Wetland Irises

In general these plants do not suffer in the same way from water

shortage before the flowering season as the *Ensatas* do and for garden purposes should be judged on their performance as herbaceous plants under reasonable garden conditions which may reflect more on the gardener than the plant. They comprise species forms such as *I. pseudacorus*, *I. virginica*, the Louisiana cultivars and the *Laevigata* cultivars. In fact, the last are best grown in water. They are unlikely to be met with in garden trials in this country yet as little breeding has been done and they do best in similar conditions to those of the *Ensatas*. Plants are being imported and they will turn up on the show benches. The *Versicolor* irises are an exception, probably because of the range of pinks and reds which have been introduced recently and, given adequate water, are good garden plants. They should be judged by much the same criteria as the *Siberians*, but one branch, or better still two, is normal.

Lophiris or Evansia Group

These are extremely varied in that some members are about 5cm (2") tall and others may have spikes of 200cm (6ft) tall. The first group are the smallest ones and these are most likely to appear in containers on the show bench or to be in sinks or rockeries in the garden. They are all herbaceous. *I. tectorum* and its forms need careful inspection since they are very liable to virus infection, but good plants should have at least one branch and may have two. *I. milesii* is misleading in that it is actually herbaceous, but looks more like a 'cane' form partly because of multiple branching.

The second group of these plants are called 'cane' ones because of the resemblance of their stems to bamboos. They are evergreen and the leaf tips are apt to be damaged over winter. In particular, though, they are noted for their branching and multiplicity of flowers - as many as half a dozen from each point over time. Only *I. japonica* and *I. confusa* are likely to be found in gardens, the others are best under cover. With so many branches and flowers a judge does expect to find plenty of flowers open when a spike is exhibited. As with a Tall Bearded the branching should be well balanced on the spike and not consist of a few widely spaced branches. Damaged leaf tips should have been trimmed and, provided this is not excessive, need not mean marking down though presumably a plant with perfect leaves would certainly be marked up.

Unguicularis Irises

Again, evergreen plants which are unlikely to be judged under garden conditions. Though new cultivars do sometimes turn up most of the flowers seen at shows are selected forms of the species. For some reason the flowers are pulled and shown without any leaves and just put into the vase every which way; so that the result is a mess. If leaves are used remember that the distinguishing feature between the forms of *I. unguicularis* and *I. lazica* is that the leaves of the last are much wider.

Iris foetidissima. Another rarity on the show bench and much overlooked in the garden. There are a number of colour forms both of flowers and 'berries'. (These are actually fleshy coverings to the true seeds.) The flower shape, too, is variable and on the whole preference should go to forms with reasonably short and wide falls. For dried flower arrangements in winter larger 'berries' are preferable if only because they dry out more slowly. Snail damage to leaves, which naturally bend over at the top quarter of their length, should be marked down and they should have a high natural gloss. They are very slow growing.

Bulbous Irises

These are more likely to be met on the show bench. The most popular are the Reticulata family. These should have a crisp appearance and only one or two leaves at flowering time. When exhibited in containers the flowers of one variety should all be much the same height, but if there are several varieties the heights may be slightly different. It is perfectly respectable to select and replant flowering bulbs for show purposes and so they should be arranged to give the best appearance with the shortest to the front and the tallest to the back. They are usually shown under both cultivar and species names, but there is much confusion in the trade. A judge should have a working knowledge of which named varieties are which colour and be able to differentiate between *I. danfordiae* and *I. winogradowii*; the colours are quite different for one thing. Remember, too, that recent collections and the practice of growing from seed has shown that the shapes of true species may vary considerably. It has always been assumed that the reticulata shape was quite different from the *histrioides* shape, but this is not so. Nevertheless the terms will probably

continue in use, in the meantime Ii. 'Pauline' and 'George' may be regarded as exemplars of the shapes which can make it difficult to judge these classes.

The **Scorpiris** or **Juno** group, is seasonally the next to appear as a rule though *I. planifolia* may turn up in the autumn. These vary between rarities with a fountain of glossy green leaves and one or two flowers and a spike some 60cm (24") tall with pairs of leaves at intervals and a flower in several nodes from the top down. In general these are grown and exhibited by alpine specialists and virused plants are unlikely to appear on the bench. Very few are suitable for the garden and they will come to the show in containers. They have naturally good texture so that if a flower appears rather thin in texture it is probably dying and can be marked down. The ones with multiple flowers start flowering from the apex of the spike. Strictly speaking, these plants are not true bulbs, but their cultivation requirements mean they are usually included with them.

The **Xiphium** group can again be divided into groups by flowering times. They will probably be shown as spikes with only the stem leaves as company. The group in general has good texture in the flowers, but virus is a problem and the judge should watch for it.

The earliest are the **Spanish** irises and the early flowering species. This is a field for real specialists and the show judge can really only work by show bench standards which boil down to presentation.

The **Dutch** cultivars are next and should have been grown in the exhibitor's garden. Shop blooms must be kept for the decorative classes. Unless the schedule specifies otherwise, the more unusual colour forms should be marked up. There used to be a splendid range of colours and they should be encouraged to return.

I. latifolia, or the **English** iris, comes later in the summer. Here, too, the colour range could be wider and exhibits with a good colour range should be marked up if possible.

Virus can be troublesome and should be watched for in all these groups.

Remontant and Reblooming Irises

These are plants, known as remontants, which can have two separate

flowerings during a year; the TB performance in this country is unreliable and a plant should only be marked up on this account if it is an absolutely regular performer in a garden. At the same time the Siberians and Ensatas can remount very well. Similarly, the reblooming varieties which usually produce spikes at intervals through the season after a main flowering, may be marked up if their performance is good and reliable. At the same time the second blooming must be judged by the same standards as the first and 'preferential repeaters' need to be watched for - these plants have a poorer first showing and a full flush later in the season.

There are many types of irises which have not been mentioned here because they are very rarely brought to shows, but the basic principles of judging apply to them, too. In general the highest marks will go to the exhibitors with the rarest and most difficult plants, or the widest range of colours or forms.

Decorative Classes

The decorative classes, otherwise known as flower arrangements, terrify most amateur judges. Those of the British Iris Society are not run under any strict rules and again it is really a matter of using your own judgement. Start by going to the local library and collecting some books on the subject and so getting an idea of what is involved. At, or before, the show read the show schedule carefully: note precisely what is allowed in any class in the way of non-iris plant material and non-plant materials. Then consider what are the iris requirements: in the very early shows these will be confined to Reticulatas, Unguicularis and Dutch iris cultivar spikes. Later in the season there may be a differentiation between bearded and non-bearded irises. At that time, for a massed exhibit, the bearded are going to take pride of place because of the bloom size with other forms used to fill in. For the so-called Japanese or 'modern' styles it is likely that the Beardless irises will be most effective because a whole spike can be used, but not necessarily. These classes usually have an overall width, and sometimes height restriction so a tape measure should be carried. Having settled any doubts about that, remember that a flower arrangement is necessarily three dimensional - upwards, outwards and forwards. Where the stand backs up to a wall and it is not possible to get behind

the exhibits the rear may be neglected, but where the stand can be approached from behind then the back view of the exhibit should look 'finished' and not scrappy. From the front the exhibit should slope slightly back to its apex which need not necessarily be at the top dead centre and the precise arrangement of the trimming materials around the base will depend on the general shape of the exhibitor's design. Supports such as Oasis or pin holders must be hidden.

If any exhibits have been set up the day before the show, it is important that they were provided with sufficient water. An exhibit which is sadly collapsing from thirst is a horrid sight. They should be kept topped up during the day if necessary, too.

This is a field in which it pays dividends to spend time on the decorative classes at county and RHS shows because it is the usual practice for the judge to comment on the exhibits and this can have a surprising effect on your own first judgements.

You would like to be a judge?

Judging is not something to be afraid of and where no actual training is available a show secretary will often arrange for a new recruit to go round with the judging panel and so gain some practical experience, but this must be supported by your own work on the plants available to you. In any case, take courage, catch the show secretary at a quiet moment and say you would like to be a judge.