

Handbook For Judges and Show Officials

Ch 21 Reblooming 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 review 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 21

REBLOOMING IRIS

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This chapter of reblooming iris will continue in its process of revision.

The first reblooming bearded iris was offered for sale in the 1880s by a plant nursery in England. Twenty years would pass before an English iris breeder would release two fall-reblooming *Iris cengialtii* hybrids.

Rebloom hybridizing commenced in the 1920s in the eastern and midwestern US. To this day, only a handful of dedicated hybridizers have worked on this unique genetic trait. The contributions of diploid iris species to rebloom are still NOT well understood. To advance breeding results, hybridizers make educated guesses, in most cases, based on garden results. A tiny genetic pool of reblooming iris has resulted in slow progress for the development of colors, color breaks, flower form, and reliability for both warm and cool season reblooming varieties.

Definition: A reblooming iris (RE) is one that blooms more than once in a growing season. There are basically five distinguishable behavior patterns in modern reblooming iris. Some iris might have multiple patterns of reblooming.

1. **Rebloomers (cyclic rebloomers)** - cultivars which complete two distinct cycles of bloom. After the spring flowering, there is a second nearly predictable period of bloom.
2. **Multiple blooming iris** - cultivars that send up bloom-stalks repeatedly at any time throughout the growing season, spring to summer and fall.
3. **Repeaters** - cultivars which produce additional bloom stalks with some regularity immediately following or shortly thereafter the initial spring bloom season. It is not uncommon for these varieties to extend the spring bloom season from four to eight weeks.

4. **Sporadic rebloomers** - varieties which unpredictably produce bloom stalks at varying times during the growing season. Many occasional rebloomers perform well on the West Coast and the southern areas of the United States. While they are highly regarded in areas where they rebloom, they might not show reblooming tendencies in colder climates.

5. **Secondary stalk rebloomers** - cultivars that send up a second stalk from the same rhizome during the same growing season. Secondary stalk rebloomers are rare.

A reblooming iris in any of these five categories should produce enough additional bloom stalks to double the total number of days of bloom produced annually. Genetic background, cultural practices and climate can affect reblooming tendencies.

Horticulturally speaking, reblooming varieties should not be compared to spring-only blooming varieties. Heavy fall-flowering means there will be LESS increase for spring blooming buds. Reblooming iris have a shorter recovery period (i.e., dormancy) which can substantially reduce the spring bloom stalk to fan ratios and overall flower quantity and size when compared to neighboring spring-only blooming clumps.

Summer weather conditions can play a large role in rebloom frequency, particularly in the fall. Heat, humidity, drought, and excessive moisture can also affect bloom stalk height, branching, bud count, flower quality and delayed bloom during this period. Judges need to look for consistent performance over a consecutive three-year period to eliminate any doubts about a reblooming variety's worthiness for American Iris Society (AIS) garden awards. More awards for rebloomers are incentive for more future breeding activity.

To promote rebloom, it is important to fertilize after the spring bloom and keep the plants well watered. In some areas, it might be necessary to provide some protection from intense heat.

The Reblooming Iris Society has an excellent *Checklist* of reblooming cultivars sorted by their USDA zones.

GARDEN JUDGING

Reblooming Iris

Bearded iris are not the only iris that can rebloom. Examples of rebloom are found in the classes of Siberian, Japanese, Louisiana, arilbred, and Pacific Coast iris. The appropriate chapter in the *AIS Handbook for Judges and Show Officials* can serve as a

general judging guide for eligible garden candidates. Instead of expending energy on fan increase and size and number of blossoms, reblooming iris devote energy to multiple cycles of bloom. This characteristic makes reblooming iris distinctive.

EXHIBITION JUDGING

Reblooming Iris

As with all other iris, a cultivar should be evaluated carefully, comparing each entry to its typical performance for the variety being judged. Judge it against its ideal self. Refer to appropriate chapters in the current Handbook for more specific, detailed guidelines.

To be fair, judge the quality of a reblooming iris as you would a non-reblooming iris. Reblooming iris should be of the same quality as once-blooming 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 at this time of year.
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.

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.

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