

# Handbook For Judges and Show Officials

## Ch 8 BB Iris



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NOTE: As a prelude to this chapter, it is recommended that judges read “Essay: Comparison of BB, IB, and MTB Iris” which can be found in the printed edition of the *Handbook for Judges* and online.

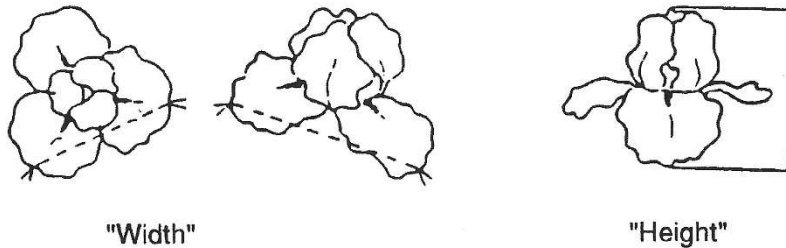
This chapter and others from the *Handbook for Judges* are available online. It is recommended that judges and other readers check the Introduction and Table of Contents in the full version of the *Handbook* in order to know the full list of available resources, e.g., Glossary, essays, Judge’s Activity Record, etc.

## Chapter 8

### BORDER BEARDED IRIS

Approved by the AIS Board of Directors, February 2, 2021

**Definition:** Erect with branched stems from 16 to 27.5 inches (40 to 70 cm) in height, bearing flowers no more than 5 inches (13 cm) in width, measured in the natural position from center fall tip to center fall tip and overall size ideally no more than 8.5 inches (22 cm) in combined width and height, measured on the vertical from the highest point of the standards to the lowest point of the falls [see illustration below]; leaves erect, in scale with and not obscuring the inflorescence; typically blooming with the tall bearded iris, which they closely resemble except that all plant and flower parts are reduced in size to balance the reduced height.



Maximum overall size on the BB flower: width + height = 8.5 inches (22 cm)  
Measured on fully expanded, fresh flowers in their natural position.

### GARDEN JUDGING

Any bearded iris conforming to the definition is eligible for registration as a border bearded (BB). There is no preference between the taller, larger examples and the shorter, smaller border bearded iris. However, judges must understand the need for proportion and balance in an ideal specimen. For example, the maximum permitted flower size is not suitable for border bearded iris at the lower end of the plant height range. Flower size, length and width of foliage and diameter of stem need to be reduced proportionally with plant height in order that

the whole plant be harmoniously in balance. Studies of proportion of stems and flowers in existing plants indicate that height should be approximately 3 to 3.25 times the overall size of the flowers. Equally important but more difficult to analyze is the balance between flower stalk and plant. In general, both thickness of stem and length and width of foliage must balance visually with stalk height and flower size. The border bearded iris in many ways resembles the tall bearded iris in color, finish and style, but is smaller, more delicate, and demonstrates good balance. The ideal true-border bearded iris has a distinctive character of its own and must never appear to be merely a foreshortened tall bearded.

Conformity to height and size limitations should be judged on the basis of typical performance. Plants consistently exceeding the height and/or flower size maximums are disqualified. However, a variety with an occasional slightly taller than normal stalk, but which is usually in class, should not be removed from consideration for awards, particularly if the plant has normal flowers. Judgment of such a variety should be withheld until it can be observed in other gardens and/or other seasons to determine its typical performance.

The first border bearded iris were bred and isolated from tall bearded lines. Typically, the border bearded iris bloom at the same time as the tall bearded iris. However, as fertile intermediates, tetraploid species and reblooming lines become more heavily involved in border bearded families, the season of bloom becomes more difficult to define. For that reason and because the flowering sequence of the classes in various climates might vary, season of bloom must be considered a continuum with no sharply defined parameters and an outstanding border bearded specimen should never be penalized for blooming earlier or later than the norm, as long as it fits the class in every other particular.

## GARDEN JUDGING

### Introduced Cultivars and Seedlings of BB Iris

The point scales are useful as guidelines in giving relative value to the specific characteristics being judged. The point scales can be of immense value to the student and even to the experienced judge when faced with evaluating iris that appear to be essentially equal.

## SCALE OF POINTS

### Garden Judging of Introduced Cultivars & Seedlings of BB Iris

1. Overall Proportion			25
2. Flower			30
	a. Color & Finish	10	
	b. Form	10	
	c. Substance & Durability	10	
3. Stalk			20
	a. Proportion	10	
	b. Branching & Buds	10	
4. Plant & Foliage			10
5. Distinctiveness			15
TOTAL			100

#### 1. Overall Proportion – 25 points

Each part of the plant, including flower size and style, stem height and thickness and foliage length and width, should be considered in relation to each other part. Points will be awarded or deducted according to how well the parts of the plant fit the whole. Nevertheless, because good proportion and balance are essential to the basic character of the border bearded iris, a pronounced lack of overall proportion disqualifies the plant from consideration for any award.

#### 2. Flower – 30 points

**a. Color and Finish** (10 points). The border bearded color palette is virtually limitless, including all colors and patterns available in tall bearded iris as well as variations derived from species or from other median classes. Whatever the color or pattern, it must be pleasing to the eye. It is probably true that the smaller the flower the more important color is. It is essential to assess the color of the flowers from across the garden and equally important to view color close up. Some iris, notably the subtle blends, are appreciated for their gentle nuances of color, even though they have no compelling garden presence. Whether strong or subtle, color should hold well throughout the life of the flower. Some colors naturally lighten a bit as the flower expands but unstable color which results in unsightly bleaching is a serious fault. Finish or texture (type of petal surface, e.g., matte, velvety, satiny, crystalline) is an important color adjunct and should be considered to the extent it enhances or detracts from the underlying color.

Beard color, which might blend, harmonize or sharply contrast with the color of the petals, should also be judged in terms of its contribution to the total color effect.

**b. Form** (10 points). Good basic architectural form is of paramount importance. While decoration such as ruffling and lace is generally considered an asset, smaller iris flowers require a certain restraint in order that decoration never overwhelms the underlying shape. Unusual beard variations, such as horns, spoons and flounces, are permitted but should be similarly restrained. Due to the compactness of the border bearded iris flower, there is a tendency toward shorter and consequently more open standards. Closed or arched and nearly closed standards are preferred. However, flowers with somewhat more open standards are acceptable provided that the standards are at least erect or cupped and firmly held, and that the overall flower shape is pleasing, and the form and color of any inner parts displayed truly merit attention. Standards which spring wide open from the base or twist in an unattractive manner, resulting in structural imbalance and disharmony, are severely penalized. Iris in the border bearded height range require some flare in the falls. The degree of flare should be appropriate to the height of the flower stalk. It is important that close scrutiny of such details be supplemented by viewing the stalk of flowers from a sufficient distance to gain perspective. No individual structural quality is as important as its contribution to the overall design.

**c. Substance and Durability** (10 points). Substance is the tissue structure which lends strength or firmness to the flower parts and renders them able to withstand the caprices of weather over a period of time. Substance includes but is not limited to thickness of petal. The compact structure of border bearded iris generally results in excellent substance. However, petal thickness per se is a dimension. For best proportion, all dimensions should be in scale. Extreme thickness of the petal is superfluous in small flowers and might result in rigidity, which detracts from the charm or personality of the flower. It might even interfere with the unfurling of the petals or render them unduly subject to fracture. Either of these effects is an extremely serious fault. The border bearded flower should have sufficient substance to support its form. It should be able to flutter a bit in a breeze but return to its pose in calm and not look permanently disarranged. Durability of flowers should be judged over a period of several days in order to determine resilience and lasting quality. Normal durability varies from climate to climate. But barring extreme weather conditions, a flower with adequate substance - generally can be expected to remain in good condition for about three days.

### 3. Stalk – 20 points

**a. Proportion** (10 points). The ideal border bearded iris stalk is relatively slim and graceful but must be strong enough to support the blossoms. In addition, both the diameter of the stalk and the type and placement of its branches must visually balance both the plant from which it emerges and the size and style of the flowers which it displays. Excessively thick, clubby stems with branches so short as to crowd the blossoms are to be severely penalized. A guideline and formula to proportion is suggested in “About IB-BB-MTB Iris.” (See Fact Sheet) It is based on a study of existing border bearded iris, most of which present one or two open flowers at a time. However, the underlying principle involves not merely flower size, but the relationship of the total color mass to the stalk which displays it. For that reason, certain flowers with extremely wide parts might appear too large for their height even though conforming to the suggested measurements. Likewise, very small flowers presented in profusion on multi-branched stems might produce sufficient color mass to balance stem height and give a pleasing effect, even though they measure much smaller than the formula suggests. In summary, no formula can or should be substituted for an innate sense of good proportion, which is developed only through broad experience with the border bearded class.

**b. Branching and Buds** (10 points). A border bearded iris stalk should have, at a minimum, two well placed branches with a terminal, with a total of seven buds. Particularly in taller specimens, more and wider branching is preferred, with a corresponding increase in the number of buds. Generally, more generous branching and greater bud count prolong the season of bloom and are to be encouraged. However, care should be taken not merely to reward these qualities for their own sake. The sequence of flowering should be observed to be sure that the blossoms are presented attractively on the stalk without crowding and that the variety does not open so many buds concurrently that its season of bloom is actually curtailed rather than prolonged. These judgments should not be made on first year plants because only in established clumps can the sequence of stem production and placement of stalks be observed. Flower stalks maturing in sequence can greatly extend season of bloom and are an important asset. However, great numbers of stalks in flower at one time, particularly those presenting many flowers simultaneously, might result in an untidy appearance of the clump as a whole. Branching and bud count should be considered not just quantitatively, but as they affect both artistic presentation and duration of the bloom season.

#### 4. Plant & Foliage – 10 points

The foliage is an important component of overall balance and must be in harmony with the inflorescence. It must be neither scanty nor too lush and with its height and width must complement the flower stalk. It should be erect in habit. The leaves of some varieties are slightly falcate (curved like a sickle or scythe) or exhibit a slight twist. These characteristics in moderation do not detract from the overall appearance of the clump. However, weak foliage that folds over at the tips presents an extremely messy appearance and should be penalized accordingly. The foliage should be of good color and not overly susceptible to damage from weather or disease. Many border bearded iris are quite vigorous while others are not. Some of the border bearded iris, those coming primarily from tall bearded lines, tend to be slow or finicky growers. No matter how beautiful or excellently proportioned the plant, it will not be useful in the garden if it grows poorly or produces stalks on all of its increase, resulting in bloom-out. These faults should be heavily penalized. Border bearded iris should be expected to perform as well in the garden as quality tall bearded. Those which exceed this expectation, particularly those capable of producing especially generous bloom, sequential stalks or true rebloom without sacrificing increase for the subsequent year, should be duly rewarded for superior performance.

#### 5. Distinctiveness – 15 points

Distinctiveness is defined as those characteristics which set something apart from others of its kind. By definition, a border iris should be instantly recognizable as such, but to receive points under this attribute, it must also differ from existing members of the class in some positive way. Distinctiveness includes such qualities as a new and beautiful combination of petal and beard color or a new pattern or combination of patterns. In the broader sense, however, the term could apply to a new iris similar in color and form to an existing one but having far superior plant habit, or one with outstanding petal finish which sets a plentiful color aglow.

In order to evaluate distinctiveness, it is necessary that the judge be familiar with a great many varieties of border bearded iris so as to be able to make valid comparisons. As the border bearded class expands and progresses, some important and desirable qualities which would be considered distinctive today might and hopefully will become commonplace!



## EXHIBITION JUDGING

### Horticultural Entries of Border Bearded 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.

The specimen must be correctly identified. It should appear well grown and exhibit no sign of disease or insect damage. It should be neither grossly oversize (over-fertilization is not good culture) nor undersize for the cultivar. Faults inherent in the variety itself (e.g. imperfections of form, branch placement) are not penalized on the show bench. But an exception is made regarding exhibits which are out of class in any respect. Such exhibits might, if judged optimally grown and typical of the cultivar exhibited, be awarded a blue ribbon. But they are not eligible for Best of Section or higher awards, since they would inaccurately represent the border bearded class to the viewing public.

In addition to cultural perfection of the specimen, presentation skills of the exhibitor are judged. The specimen should be clean and free of mechanical injury and groomed to show it at its best advantage. Any removal of spent blooms or trimming of foliage must be inconspicuous. The blossoms should be unquestionably fresh and, if there are two or more displayed on the stalk, they should be in harmony with one another. Flowers which show marked signs of aging detract seriously from the exhibit and are to be penalized. In evaluating condition, some allowance may be made for the negative effect of extreme weather conditions in the area at the time of show especially if large numbers of the exhibits are affected. However, the judge may not evaluate the stalk in terms of how it appeared when cut or anticipate its appearance later on the show day. It must be judged as it appears at the moment of judging.

Although TBs that are larger than normal might be awarded points for an especially well-grown specimen, stalks of BB cultivars should clearly be in class

in terms of both flower and stalk. Flowers and stalks that are out of class should not receive any points for cultural perfection.

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 BB Iris

1. Cultural Perfection			75
	a. Flower	45	
	b. Stalk	30	
2. Condition & Grooming			25
TOTAL			100

### EXHIBITION JUDGING BB 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.

Judges visiting a show are urged to review the seedling entries and use these ballots to reward excellence where they find it.

**SCALE OF POINTS**  
**Exhibition Judging of BB Seedling Entries**

1. Overall Proportion			30
2. Flower			30
	a. Color & Finish	10	
	b. Form	10	
	c. Substance	10	
3. Stalk			20
	a. Proportion	10	
	b. Branching & Buds	10	
4. Distinctiveness			20
TOTAL			100

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Notes: Border Bearded Iris