

Home Improvement Guide '66

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Tips on Gardening

By Betty Frankel

IRIS
Iris, named for the Greek goddess of the rainbow, are among the most beautiful of garden flowers. The gorgeously colored blooms, rising above the clump of sword-like leaves on tall stalky stems, have a unique form. The three inner petals, called standards, are held upright and the three outer petals, called falls, curve down. The texture is crisp but delicate, and true to its name, there seem to be a limitless range of colors and hues.

Because of the wide range of colors and the considerable variation in size and form, as well as the ease with which they are grown, they have become a true collector's flower. Hobbyists, may in the Farmington area, grow hundreds of varieties and are always seeking new kinds to add to their collections.

There are about 200 wild species widely distributed throughout the North Temperate zone. Twenty native species are found in North America, chiefly in the Eastern part of the United States. Among the best known of the wild iris are the blue flag, iris versicolor, and the yellow Louisiana iris.

In cultivation there are two main groups, those which grow from bulbs and those which grow from flat, thickened rootstocks called rhizomes. In the bulb category are the dwarf iris reticulata which is popular in early spring rock gardens, and the English, Dutch and Spanish iris that are good garden flowers and also popular florists' cut flowers.

THE RHIZOME IRIS are of four distinct types—tall bearded, intermediate bearded, dwarf bearded, and beardless. The "beard" is a line of fuzzy hairs creeping down the outer petals adding an interesting bit of textural contrast and accent color.

Many iris fanciers belong to the Iris and Hesperis Society, a national organization with a local subsection Michigan chapter. Several officers of this group are local residents.

The president has a three-acre garden in nearby Southfield, and Mrs. Thomas F. Mahoney of Lilac St. and Mrs. Raymond Exner of Violet St. in Farmington are secretary and corresponding secretary, respectively, of the Southeastern chapter. Both Mrs. Exner and Mrs. Mahoney are ardent iris fans and grow hundreds of varieties in their gardens. Kitty Mahoney says that she has 300 varieties of iris in her yard. This is in addition to extensive beds of daylilies and other perennials and wild flowers.

She has all kinds of iris, including dwarf, intermediate and tall bearded iris giving her a range of sizes and blooms over a long period of time. When asked about her favorite old varieties, Mrs. Mahoney mentioned New Snow, which is as white as its name implies; Rhythm and Great Lakes, which are medium blue; and Raven Wings which is a deep purple and especially effective combined with bright yellow Golden Fleece, another old favorite. She mentioned that the favorite of most men is Wabash, an old-timer with white standards and purple falls.

Mrs. Mahoney's chief pets are her new varieties. Most of the recently introduced iris have large ruffled flowers and are very showy. Her particular favorites include Orange Parade, a deep yellow-orange with an orange beard; Emma Cook, white edged in blue; One Desire, deep pink with a deeper pink beard; Henry Shaw, white; and Polka Time which Mrs. Mahoney enthusiastically describes as being like a beautiful ruffled purple paper napkin. **AN UNUSUAL LITTLE** iris grown by Mrs. Mahoney is called the vesper iris. It grows from seed, easily and begins blooming later in the summer than most other iris. The buds swell like little balloons and open into bell-like flowers the size of a half dollar. They open late in the day and have faded by morning. Mrs. Mahoney says her vesper iris can be depended on to pop open promptly at quarter to three each afternoon and the opening is often observed by a group of admiring children.

Mrs. Mahoney, like other iris fanciers, buys and trades to get new varieties and has even grown some kinds from seed, making her own hybrids. She says it takes three years for a plant to grow to blooming size, so this is a facet of her hobby that requires patience. Iris are very easy to grow. Mrs. Mahoney says that they will grow well in any ordinary soil, but cautions against the use of manure for fertilizer. When planting them each year, work good commercial fertilizer into the soil. Plant them in full sun.

Mrs. Mahoney and Mrs. Exner and other members of the Iris Society are busy now preparing for the show to be held at Livonia Mall on Saturday, June 11. They extend an invitation to all area iris fans to bring stalks of their favorite blooms to enter in the show which is open to both amateur and commercial growers. A visit to the show is sure to be a delight for all iris fanciers and will be a rich source of ideas for all gardeners.

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Fence Building Time in Offing

Early spring is the time for fence building.

The project can get underway even while weather is uncertain with selection and purchase of the lumber needed for the fence. You will need squares for posts — western red cedar 4x4 or 6x6—plus 2x4s or 2x6s for the rails. Board sizes depend on the style of fence.

The home handyman can also cut the fence members to the required lengths in his basement workshop, and assemble the other materials he'll need for construction — laming bar, level, twine, concrete for post holes, stakes, nails and hammer.

Once these preliminaries are out of the way, the actual building can begin without wasting even a minute of the first warm, sunny day.

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All modern roses are "ever-blooming," that is, they have a burst of bloom in spring, quite a few bloom all summer and then a big bursting of bloom again in the fall until heavy frost.

Insist on "ever-blooming" roses, suggests the American Association of Nurseriesmen. The different types of roses include:

Hybrid teas. These generally offer the most perfectly-formed blooms for the formal garden or for cut flowers to decorate the home. The colors are magnificent.

Floribunda roses offer many blooms on a single plant. If you are most interested in the quantity of blooms, many of which also are of good quality, these plants are for you. They are excellent as living fences and landscape decoration.

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