

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER



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**Beautiful Irises Fill the Garden with Color**  
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What beautiful flowers in the garden! They remind me of Mother's Day! The bearded irises provide a rainbow of color in the landscape. The beardless Siberian iris is also blooming at this time.

The beautiful bearded iris flower has three upright petals in the center, called standards, and three sepals, which are actually modified leaves, hanging downward, called falls. The size and shape of the petals and sepals depends on the species or cultivar of iris. When looking closely at the center of the falls, what looks like tufts of hair are the male reproductive part of the flower. This characteristic gives the name bearded to this group of irises.

Numerous species, hybrids, and cultivars of bearded iris have been divided into six categories according to height. The categories are: miniature dwarf, standard dwarf, intermediate, miniature tall, border, and tall. Information about the categories is from the Bluegrass Iris Society.

Miniature dwarf bearded irises are up to 8 inches tall and bloom very early. Many times the buds are destroyed by freezing temperatures because of the early blooming time.

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Standard dwarf bearded irises range from 8 to 16 inches tall. The flowers bloom in early spring.

Intermediate bearded irises range in height from 16 to 27.5 inches. The flowers bloom between the standard dwarf bearded iris and tall bearded iris.

Miniature tall bearded irises start to bloom in early May with the tall bearded iris. The height ranges from 16 to 27.5 inches tall.

Border bearded irises bloom with the tall bearded iris. The plant height ranges from 16 to 27.5 inches.

Tall bearded irises are the most popular and bloom in mid to late spring. Their height reaches more than 27.5 inches. There are some cultivars that rebloom.

The flower colors of bearded iris include virtually all the colors in the rainbow from nearly black to pristine white. Some flowers are bicolored with the falls one color and standards another. More than one flower is usually produced on each flower stem.

Bearded irises prefer to grow in full sun. If the plants are grown in too much shade, there will be few or no blossoms. A well-drained soil is important for iris to prevent rotting.

The propagation of bearded iris is completed by dividing the clumps of rhizomes in August. Rhizomes are underground, thick horizontal stems. The entire clump is lifted and separated by breaking or cutting the individual rhizomes apart. In selecting plants from an old clump, choose the strongest and keep as many feeder roots as possible. The leaves, which are called the fan, should be cut back to half or one-third their length. The rhizome is planted at ground level with the roots from the rhizome planted downward into the soil. Thoroughly water

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the rhizomes after planting. As you see the blooms of the bearded iris now, mark the plants you would like to share with others or take note of the ones to include in your garden in August.

Siberian iris (*Iris sibirica*) is beardless. It blooms in mid to late May and lasts into June. Flower color includes purple, blue, lavender, pink, white, cream, and yellow. You will also find cultivars of Siberian iris that are bicolored with the standards one color and falls another. Purple, blue, and white tones are most common. The flower size is smaller than the bearded iris, and can be used in fresh floral arrangements.

The foliage of Siberian iris is narrow and grass-like. After the flowers have finished blooming, the foliage is still attractive. The plant height ranges from 22 to 34 inches.

Siberian irises can be grown in full sun or light shade in soil that is not overly dry or remains excessively wet.

Siberian irises rarely need dividing. When division is needed or desired, lift the whole clump and break into smaller pieces. Cut back the foliage to about 10 inches and replant slightly deeper than previously grown. Siberian irises should be divided in August.

For more information about irises, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or [annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu](mailto:annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu).

## **Annette's Tip:**

Thankfully, there are tall bearded irises that rebloom in the late summer and fall when the growing season is long enough. A few cultivars that rebloom are 'Immortality' with white flowers, 'Polar King' with white flowers, 'Pink Attraction' with pink flowers, 'Best Bet' with blue flowers, and 'Invitation' with white standards and apricot falls.

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With the freezing weather in early spring, some of the old-fashioned hydrangeas (*Hydrangea macrophylla*), referred to as mop head type, flowers may have been killed. The newer cultivars may bloom a little later yet this season because they also bloom on new wood.

## **Upcoming Events:**

Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Open House is May 20 from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Come for free recipe samples, tour the Extension Master Gardener Raised Bed Demonstration Vegetable Garden and Monarch Waystation, and for other free items as well as finding out how our land grant institution, through our office, serves the community through education.

Tick bite prevention, alpha-gal basics, and diet and lifestyle management with alpha-gal will be presented in the program “Living with Alpha-gal Syndrome” on Thursday, May 29 at 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. through a webinar watched at home by registering at <https://ukfcs.net/AgS> or through a watch group at the OCTC Technical Building Room 100 by calling the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office at 270-685-8480 to reserve a seat.

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