



Trowel Talk!

September, 2012

Keep an eye on old irises

Irises are some of the most attractive plants that can grace our gardens. The unique beauty of their blossoms defies description. But when they've finished blooming, they need some kindly attention.

Why can't we just leave them alone and lazily enjoy them year after year? One reason is that they gradually deplete the soil where they are planted. The rhizomes grow old and vulnerable to attack by insects or fungi. Or too much foliage blocks out sun and air from their roots. Every three to five years we need to dig, divide and replant healthy sections in newly enriched surroundings. The best time of the year in which to do this is from late July to early fall.

You can enrich the soil with compost and well-rotted manure – in the old location if no borers were present – in a new location if they were. Positioning the sections in sets of three to seven is appropriate. When you're satisfied with your pattern, go ahead and plant – but not very deeply. The tops of the rhizomes need to remain exposed. In my garden irises are placed with fans up and rhizomes pointing in the same direction. Rootlets are spread out below. I apply 2.5cm of soil over all, press it down by hand and then water. If heaving takes place during the winter, a thin layer of sandy soil can be added on top in the spring.



Photo by Edythe Falconer
Iris germanica (bearded iris)

Let's start with bearded irises. A fork is best for digging because it does least damage as we pry the rhizomes out of their space. Once up, examine them to see what can be saved and what should be discarded. Any part that is diseased, infested with borers, or simply old like the central rhizomes, should be disposed of. The rest can be sectioned with a sharp knife and prepared for replanting. Each section should have a piece of rhizome with some roots and at least two leaf fans attached. Remove dead leaves from the fans and wash the soil off the sections before letting them dry.



Bearded iris rhizome

The rhizomes of beardless irises are more delicate than those of the bearded variety so more care must be taken in handling them. Otherwise digging, lifting, and section preparation are similar to that used for bearded irises. Sections

should contain 5 to 9 shoots and be planted 38cm to 45cm apart. Foliage can be trimmed to 16 cm. or so. Once sections have been prepared for planting they must not be allowed to dry out. Beardless irises can be planted an average of 4 to 5 cm deep but recommended depths will vary according to variety.

Bulbous irises include English, Dutch, Spanish, Reticulatas, and Junos. They are separated by removing off-set bulbs. This can be done after foliage has ripened and died. After forking them up and shaking off the soil, give them time to dry – with the exception of Junos which must NOT be allowed to dry out. Clumps can be divided into single bulbs with some roots still attached. Diseased or dead material is discarded. Bulbous irises like well-drained soil and full sun. They can be replanted singly or in clumps, 5cm. deep and 14 to 20 cm. apart.



Photo by Mary Ann Van Berlo
Iris reticulata (bulbous iris)

If this seems like a lot of work just remember – you can have one variety or another in bloom from early May through to July. Eventually, your efforts do pay off when rejuvenated plants get their next opportunity to present their showy blooms.

Edythe Falconer
Master Gardener

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September TO DO List

- Keep watering trees and shrubs into the fall (until the ground freezes). Even after the recent rain, it is important to water newly planted trees and shrubs well into the fall while their roots are still establishing. A well-hydrated plant will suffer less damage from drying winter sun and winds.
- Now is the perfect time to divide and move perennials. Refer back to the notes and pictures you took earlier this summer to start your garden renovation.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month:

Peonies are very long-lived plants but the crown of the plant can become very woody, with sparse centre growth. The plant may stop blooming or produce fewer blooms. When this occurs it is time to rejuvenate your peony.

September is the ideal time to divide or move a peony. Before you dig, use a marker to draw a line on the stem at soil level so that you know how deep to replant it. Planting too deep will result in a reduction of blooms.

Using a sharp spade, dig deeply around the plant, but try not to break the big fleshy roots. Lift the entire clump and shake off the soil. With a sharp knife, cut the plant into divisions with at least 4-5 eyes (growing tips) per division.



Prepare the planting area by adding some organic matter. Plant the division in full sun, in well drained soil. Water well after planting. If you mulch, do not mulch over the crown of the plant.



Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton

Where to find us this month for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1-3 pm (all year)
- Wednesday 7-8 pm (April - September)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

- monitored daily
- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

CLINICS:

Ottawa Farmers' Market (Brewer Park - formerly located at Lansdowne Park):
Sundays, July through September (9 a.m. - 1 p.m.)

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Fresh Approach to Florals - September 17, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

Catherine Disley-Engler, Master Gardener
Top Generation Club Hall, 4373 Generation Court, Ramsayville, Ontario
Hosted by the Gloucester Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Renovating an Old Garden - September 25, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener
Tom Brown Arena, 141 Bayview Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario
Hosted by the Ottawa Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Is Your Garden for the Birds? - October 1, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

David Hinks, Master Gardener
RCMP Camp Hall, on Nicholl's Island Road, north of Manotick, Ontario
Hosted by the Manotick Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Notable Gardens of Quebec - October 9, 2012 - 7:00 p.m.

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener & Nora Lee
Champlain Park Fieldhouse, 149 Cowley Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario
Hosted by the Champlain Park Garden Club (fee may apply for guests)

The Winter Garden: Planning and Planting for the Naked Garden - October 10, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

Julianne Labreche, Master Gardener
Larkin House Community Centre, Larkin Drive, Nepean, Ontario
Hosted by the Barrhaven Garden Club (fee may apply for guests)

Culinary Herbs - October 11, 2012 - 7:00 p.m.

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener & Richard Guenette, Foodie
Old Ottawa South Firehall, 260 Sunnyside Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario
Hosted by the Old Ottawa South Garden Club (guests welcome)

What to do with a Mature Garden - October 17, 2012 - 6:30 p.m.

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener
Maxville Complex Hall, Maxville, Ontario
Hosted by the Maxville Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Renovating a Garden - October 22, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener
Library Basement, 100 Old Chelsea Road, Old Chelsea, Quebec
Hosted by the Gatineau Valley Gardeners (guests welcome)

Touring Memorable Gardens of Northeast North America - October 23, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

Rebecca Last & Judy Wall, Master Gardeners & Nora Lee
Tom Brown Arena, 141 Bayview Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario
Hosted by the Ottawa Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Seasonal Planter Demonstration - November 7, 2012 - 7:00 p.m.

Catherine Disley-Engler, Master Gardener
Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely, Ontario
Hosted by the Greely Gardeners Group (fee may apply for guests)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: speakers@mgottawa.mgoi.ca

For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>