



Bearded iris help add height to a colourful border display.



Some bearded iris, such as 'Victoria Falls', are known as remountant iris, flowering more than once in the season.

They need a sunny site and well-drained alkaline, neutral or acid soil. It is essential that the rhizomes see the sun, so the ground should be kept free from weeds and other plants, and fallen leaves, at all times. The end of each rhizome flowers, and new sideshoots are produced behind this. After a few years, these will get crowded and need to be divided. How long this takes will depend on the variety, but most will need to be divided after four years. Overcrowded clumps do not flower well.

To divide, the clump is dug up and split, cutting or snapping off the newest shoots with approximately 4in (10cm) of rhizome. This should be less for the smaller types. The foliage is trimmed back to approximately half its length,

to reduce water loss and help prevent wind rock. The old pieces are discarded. The soil is dug over, with high-potash fertiliser added, such as rose fertiliser. The prepared pieces are planted 6-10in (15-25cm) apart, depending on the size of the variety. Ideally, they are arranged facing the same way, with the cut part of the rhizome pointing south. This helps prevent the leaves shading the rhizome.

The rhizome is not covered with soil, which is pressed firmly around the roots to hold them steady. Deep planting, especially on heavy soil, causes rot. If it does not rain within two weeks of planting, the plants are given a soak. After that, they only need keeping free from weeds.

A high-potash feed is beneficial in March/April, when they start to grow. At this time, some of the old leaves can be pulled or cut away to reduce rot and make them tidier. The new flower stems may need protecting from snails. To make the display tidier, the faded flowers can be broken off. Once all the flowers have died, the whole flower stem should be snapped off at the base, along with the adjoining leaves.

With their intricate blooms and dazzling colour, bearded iris are a captivating addition to the garden, whether in borders or containers, and an elegant cut flower for the home. Their aversion to crowds ensures their singular beauty can be fully appreciated as they stand slender and proud in the early summer sunshine. ■



When rhizomes are divided, they are replanted with the cut part facing south, above the soil.

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