

### Dividing Bearded Irises

Mid- to late summer is the time for bearded iris division. Irises should be divided every three or four years. Dig up rhizome clumps, rinse or shake off soil, and cut apart with a sharp knife. Throw away old woody centers, but keep healthy outside sections that have leaves growing out of them. To reduce moisture loss, clip leaves back to one third of their original height. Lay cut, trimmed rhizomes in the shade for a few hours to callus before planting.

An iris bed should be in a sunny location in rich, well-drained soil. If drainage is poor, raise the planting area 4 to 6 inches above the surrounding ground level. Cultivate soil to a depth of 12 inches. Select healthy iris rhizomes with new growth buds (also known as leads). To avoid open-centered clumps, plant rhizomes in a triangle, 8 inches apart, with the buds pointing away from the center. You will have a good-looking clump next summer. If you space the irises farther apart (12 to 18 inches) you will start with a sparse looking clump but it won't have to be divided as soon as a closer planting would. Set the rhizomes in the soil so that they are just covered. Roots should be well spread and tops of rhizomes should be exposed to sun and air.

Water at once to settle soil around the roots. Continue to water until fall rains take over, but be careful not to overwater. Too much moisture makes rhizomes susceptible to rot.