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JUNE
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Gardening

REX STOUT'S IRIS
by **RUTH STOUT**

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5 recent introductions of new, rare colors and combinations, illustrated to the left in natural color. Stunning! A catalog value of \$9.00 for \$6.00.

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Selected by a panel of Iris Experts as the 5 Iris of 1956. Choice plants for the discerning gardener.

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GARDENS

ROUTE 2, BOX 329-E
SALEM, OREGON

HARLEQUIN

PINNACLE

REDWYNE

PINK
SENSATION



Let's plant iris

For a gala display next year, divide old plants after bloom and order new ones now

BEARDED iris are among the easiest of all plants to grow. They thrive even under neglect and in almost any soil from sand to clay. But, if you really want a glorious color picture in your garden, give them a place in the sun, far away from tree or shrub roots, and a medium heavy garden soil enriched with a little bonemeal thoroughly mixed in. Avoid barnyard manure since it produces lush growth that invites root rot.

For a good showing the first year, set rhizomes about a foot apart in groups of three, and space these groups three feet apart. Such a planting will become crowded more quickly than when rhizomes are placed farther apart, but with generous spacing, it takes several years for a really good display.

Plan to add new varieties to your rainbow iris garden this year. Why not send for catalogues early so you'll be sure to get your order in before supplies are exhausted? Rhizomes are shipped during July and August, so reserve garden space for them—you will not regret it. Few flowers give so much bloom for so little effort.



You can have generous bloom like this a year after planting



↓
Iris clumps benefit when dug and divided every 3 or 4 years. Do this any time after their blooming period up to early September. Cut foliage back halfway and wash roots with hose for easier division



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Separate the strongest, healthy rhizomes from the clump for replanting. Discard weak or rotted growth. Before planting, work bonemeal into soil, mixing it in well

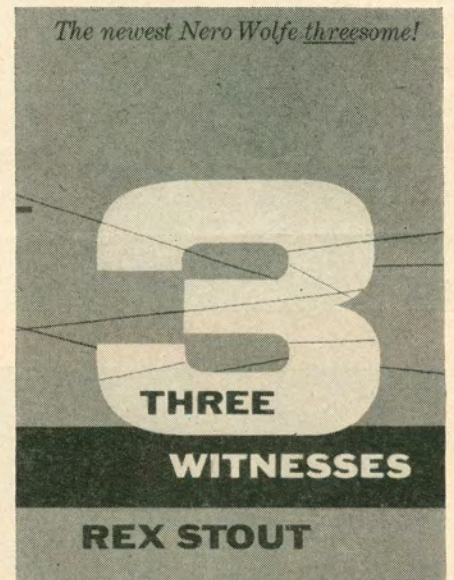
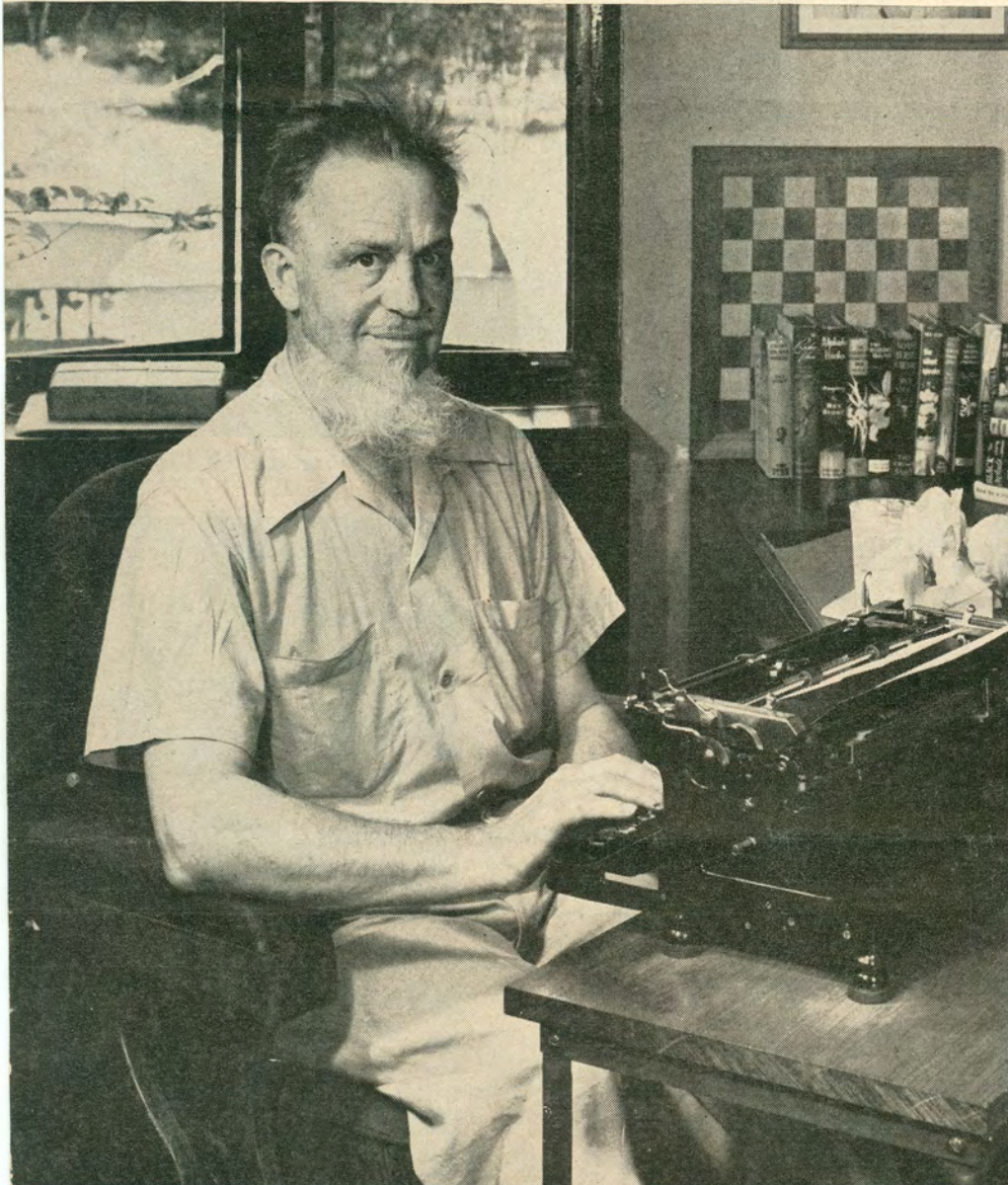


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When ready to plant, dig two slanting holes leaving a narrow ridge in the center. Set the rhizome on this ridge and spread roots out for anchorage



↓
Cover roots with soil so the rhizome lies at or just beneath surface. Firm well with your feet and water regularly until roots take hold and when weather is dry

V erdict:



THE JUDGE, in this case, is Rex Stout, one of our finest mystery writers and a keen gardener. Stout built his house, designed and built the furniture. Refusing to see his garden as through a glass darkly, he put acres of land between himself and neighbors; banished curtains

iris are wonderful

No question Rex Stout knows plants. So what's with him and iris?

Why did they get him? Suspenseful color? Form? His sister third degrees him

By RUTH STOUT

My brother Rex breezed into our kitchen the other night with a frozen goose and a potted hoya. He had come in response to my SOS; I had agreed to write this article about his iris and needed his help.

He said triumphantly, "For 25 years I've been asking you why you don't grow iris, hoping to get you to ask me why I do. At last you want to know."

I assured him I didn't give a darn, personally, why he grew iris, but under the circumstances I had no choice but to listen to his reasons.

"I bet you don't even know they are the one thing—flower or vegetable—that won't stand for a mulch," he went on. "The rhizomes have to be planted practically at the surface of the ground and need the sun shining directly on them. And *you* turning yourself inside out trying to coax everybody to mulch everything all year round. Are you sure you're broadminded enough to write about an exception?"

I was a little disgusted at this news. I do, as a matter of fact, grow small clumps of iris around our shady frog and lily pond, and mulch them, and never separate them, and they bloom. But the less said about my humble, ill-treated iris the better.

After dinner, and after Rex had admired our immense 17-year-old gardenia and had insulted the camellia he gave us last summer, we settled down cozily and I said resignedly:

"Well, if you must bore me . . . why do you grow iris?"

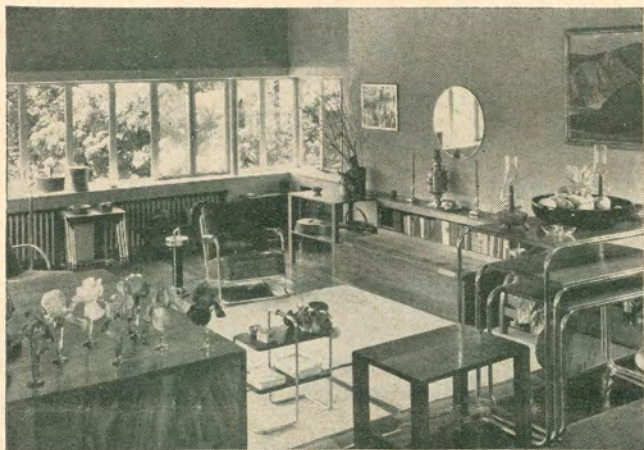
He was off

"If you like to grow flowers and have a place to grow them there are three ways to set about it. One way is to hire an expert head gardener at ten thousand a year and from four to five assistants at from three to five thousand each, tell them you like flowers and expect them to grow some. The second way is to buy seeds, scatter them around and hope for the best. The third way is in between. You read a few books, buy some seeds and plants, sort of decide what you'll put where, and you are off.

"Then as the years go by you notice things. You find you really don't care much for some of the flowers and

EXHIBIT A is Minnie Colquitt, a white plicata with bands of wine-purple stitching on its falls and standards





JUDGE'S CHAMBERS look out on lawns and gardens (see opposite) featuring iris, peonies, species tulips, lupines, fritillarias—brought from Tibet

out they go. Some you like and want to keep but apparently they don't care for you, so out they go too, of their will, not yours. Some get too many bugs and diseases, some don't like your soil well enough, some grow too high or too low. A few, like phlox, keep going magenta on you and others grow but don't bloom.

"After five years or maybe even 10, you find that one of them suits your locality and temperament and your basic idea of what a plant and a flower ought to be. I've settled for tall bearded iris. For me, they have more good points and fewer bad ones than any other flower I am intimate with."

No kidding

"But Rex," I protested, "your iris start blooming around May 26 and stop the middle of June and that's it for the whole year."

"Sure. That's fine," he said. "Not like delphiniums, which keep trying to kid you that they can be beautiful for three months, nor like hybrid tea roses. Roses are too elegant to kid you but, inevitably, you try to kid them. You try to stretch their blooming period through July and into August and all you get is a pain in the neck . . . or in the back which is worse."

"When an iris is through for the season, it is through. Most flowering plants try to pretend that when they've finished blooming their green is still a treat for the eye, and nearly all of them are wrong. Not iris. Their long floppy green spears pretend to nothing whatever; they merely ask to be allowed their space and to be tolerated on the modest ground that if you hide them or crowd them you will be darned sorry next June. You never have to say, showing guests around, 'Of course the iris aren't at their best now.' Any guest, even one who can't tell a pansy from a poppy, can see that at a glance."

No restraint either

"Then where on earth are the reward and excitement?" I asked and Rex gave me a pained glance.

"You've seen my 186 varieties, scattered around various spots over a total expanse of some three acres on

all sides of the house. The reward and excitement are crowded into those wonderful three weeks in late May and early June. No modesty about iris then. At the height of the season the jungle of color is overwhelming. It runs all the way from the tall, cool elegance of Lady Mohr to the blazing braggadocio of Fire Dance. The pure proud white of Snow King; the incredibly deep rich yellow of Ola Kala; the lovely full blue of Chivalry; the velvety deep darkness, almost black, of Sable; the gay flippant medley of Argus Pheasant; the dual personality of Pinnacle, with milkmaids for standards and duchesses for falls; the delicate virginity of Pink Cameo and Cherie; the misty shimmer of Blue Rhythm; the spectacular virtuosity of good old Ranger. . . ."

"Come, come!" I interrupted. "You memorized that from some advertisement. You're just showing off."

"The dickens I am," he said. "I'd have to provide even more grandiose epithets for some of the newest and most expensive varieties priced at 10 to 20 dollars each. But no one needs them to start a collection of iris glory."

Some good points

"Hold it; let's be accurate. Those you raved about sound as if they cost a hundred dollars apiece. Admit it; why not?"

Rex shook his head.

"I didn't name one that can't be bought from any good grower for 75 cents to two dollars a rhizome. All will bloom the year after you plant them and thereafter and this is one of the many great merits of iris: they can be expected, with half-way decent care, to prosper and multiply indefinitely."

"Half-way decent care can mean almost anything, according to who says it," I pointed out. "What does it mean when you say it?"

"I mean it literally. Shipping you one or 100 rhizomes, any good grower will send along a small printed sheet which gives you all the directions you need. What iris demands it must have: sunshine, good drainage, shallow planting, and soil with a little nourishment in it but not too much . . . and that's all. If you want to try for extravagant results in size and amount of bloom, or height or strength of stalk, iris usually will be glad to cooperate. That's fun but you can get great beauty without any trouble, with half-way decent care."

Then Rex expanded on the opportunity iris offers for playing with color. More than any other garden plant on earth, he said. And I remembered *Continued on page 52*

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Gardens

NG, OREGON

Verdict: iris are wonderful

Continued from page 51

the spot he had for a couple of years, 30 feet long and 3 feet wide, devoted entirely to blue: the extremely delicate Azure Skies at one end, deepening gradually to the sombre Black Hills at the other. Stout's rhapsody in blue was played by 15 well-known varieties that year.

I mentioned it and Rex said, yes, you could do the same thing with yellows, pinks, reds, blends, variegatas or plicatas. You couldn't begin to do it with any other flower, he said.

You can't get away from V W

Then, reluctantly, I brought up the distasteful question of pests and diseases, the one unpleasant aspect of gardening. Rex said there was only one bug, the iris borer, that would ever interfere with your pleasure and now, with DDT, it didn't stand a chance. No dusting or spraying of large masses of foliage is required. You merely spray the ground and sod in and around a bed two or three times in early April.

Aside from that, he said, if you insist on having bugs or diseases to cope with because you love to cope, you have to import them.

I knew he kept a record of his experiences with iris and asked him to tell me just how he did it.

"I have a looseleaf book in which each variety has its own page. Each year, as buds start to open, I begin to make entries. Here is a sample from the page on Fair Elaine: '1944 E—Med—Bf 6/9—V W'. The E means early; Med means medium height; Bf 6/9 means Fair Elaine was in full bloom on the ninth of June in the year 1944; V W means verdict: wonderful.

"That verdict business is the only serious trouble I ever have with iris. There are so many varieties that you'd think surely some must be merely excellent (V E) or good (V G) or even fair (V F), but every year I have the very devil of a time getting away from that V W."

The lady is sold

When I told Rex goodnight I asked him exactly when one separates iris; in other words, when we should drive over for a few bushels of rhizomes. He had been offering them to me through the years and I had said no because I had chosen to spend my spare time on flowers that bloom in summer. He never had told me be-



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FLOWERS FOR THE JUDGE come from three acres facing the rolling foothills of New York State. Enormous drifts of iris, hundreds of them, in 186 varieties (old and new—all tried and found wonderful by Rex Stout) are scattered about the place. They bloom furiously for three glorious weeks, usually in late May and early June

