

The Guardian Gardener's Handbook: The Three Legs We Stand On

The GG program stands equally on these three legs. Note the word *equally*. Without all three, the tripod falls over; the program cannot function.

1. Discover & Acquire

The first step of preserving a historic iris is to find it and get a piece of it. While this sounds obvious and simple, it's anything but that. All the "easy" ones have been found. Now we must look to older collections and botanical gardens to find irises that may be the last of their kind. Tempting though it is to seek these irises in old farmyards and cemeteries, that's almost never a good idea for our purpose. Those are wonderful places to find fine old irises, but their names have been lost, and in many cases, they never had names. By all means, grow and enjoy those nameless beauties if you love them, but they are not part of this program. See "Let There Be Noids" elsewhere in this handbook.

2. Confirm Identity

This step, so vital to true preservation, is too often overlooked. It's so easy to fall victim to wishful thinking; we desperately want the name to be correct. Please notice, though, that ID confirmation is one of the three big facets of what we do. It's that important.

The GG program concerns itself with the preservation of *named* cultivars. There is no point in making the considerable effort to grow and distribute a named iris if the name is incorrect; in fact, that's the opposite of preservation. Therefore, one of the most important things we do is to confirm the identity of the irises we grow.

Why don't we do that in the *Discover & Acquire* stage? Ideally, we do. Usually, though, the irises are labeled or mapped, but not in bloom when we find them. If we have only one chance to acquire the iris that is believed to be correctly named, we must dig it while we can. We've learned the hard way that, all too often, to wait is to lose the iris. The bulldozers are on the horizon.

Once we get the iris into one or more Guardian Gardens, we can wait for its first bloom season, then photograph and measure and sniff, and work with the HIPS ID Committee to attempt to confirm its identity. See "Confirming Identity" elsewhere in this handbook.

3. Preserve & Share

While waiting for the first bloom on the new iris, we'll give it the best care we can. We'll mark it with at least two labels, one buried under the clump and one visible, and map its position in the garden carefully. We'll record when we got it, and from whom, and if we can we'll even record where that person got it (the

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provenance of this particular iris plant). See elsewhere in the *GG Handbook* for more on those topics. A healthy iris replicates itself, so we'll keep our iris as healthy as we can.

Once the iris has bloomed and identity is confirmed, we'll continue to monitor it, weed it, and make sure its visible label is intact. We'll make sure it drops no seeds. Every year we'll report to the GG program that we have it. Eventually our iris will clump up enough to divide. It must have four good strong rhizomes that we'll keep, and at least two or three more to share. We'll list that iris on the GG Forum as available for other GGers to adopt. When someone requests it, we'll dig and ship a rhizome promptly, so it's out of the ground as short a time as possible. We'll share information with the new owner about where and when we got it, and any provenance information we may have. And so the long cycle starts again.

Please refer to the Table of Contents of this handbook for much more information.