

## The Guardian Gardener's Handbook: Let There Be Noids

### What's a noid?

A *noid* is an iris with *no ID*. It's an unknown; it has lost its name (if it ever had one; more on that in a minute). We find them in old cemeteries, farmyards, our neighbors' gardens, back alleys—they're all over the place. Many of them never bloom where we find them, as they've become overcrowded and shaded out. So we dig a toe, take it home and plant it in a good place, and next year...Wow! Lookit that! It's beautiful!

### Why doesn't GG work more with noids?

Humans love to classify things, so we want to identify our lovely noids. What most people don't realize (I certainly didn't until I was trained by an expert) is how very difficult it can be to identify an iris. Beginners try to work from just one photograph, the classic glamour shot of the flower. It doesn't work that way. Many photos of many aspects of the flower and plant are needed, many measurements, many notes, taken over several bloom seasons—and even then, the only real way to confirm identity is to grow the noid beside a known iris to see if they match.

In addition, many of our found irises *never were named varieties*. Back in the day, iris breeders and nurseries commonly offered large numbers of unnamed seedlings for what they called "landscape planting." You could buy 100 lovely irises, not quite lovely enough for the breeder to name and register, but plenty good enough to provide color in large masses, for much less money than if you bought named irises individually. And that's what many people did. Farm wives during the Great Depression of the 1930s could club together, buy 100 mixed pretty irises for a bargain price, and divide them up. Why wouldn't they?

Fast-forward to now. Here we are, digging up the survivors of those bargain irises and trying to put names on them. We can't. *They never had names*. In addition, irises do set and drop seed. Clumps that are left to grow half wild do not get deadheaded, so they drop seeds, which grow and join the throng in bloom. Named irises do not come true from seed. The seedlings may be beautiful, but you'll never be able to identify them. *They never had names*.

### Is identifying noids ALWAYS hopeless?

Indeed not. We differentiate between *true noids*, which truly are always going to be suspect, and *maybe noids*. Picture an iris rescue taking place in the garden of an elderly person who can no longer properly care for her irises. She has kept them deadheaded, but just can't dig anymore. We can't see these irises in bloom to confirm ID in her garden, but our elderly gardener has some labels and a map. Irises from that rescue are *maybe noids*. We distribute them to GGers, saying, "We believe this is tall bearded 'Yiffniff', but it might be from the next

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clump over.”

When the first bloom arrives in a year or two, we'll know one way or the other. Those *maybe noids* may be our only chance at getting a rare iris, but even then we must not succumb to wishful thinking. We'll send photos, descriptions, and measurements to our ID team to confirm identity.

### **Love your noids AS noids**

Putting an incorrect name on a noid, even inadvertently and with the best of intentions, then sharing that iris under that name, causes real damage to the preservation effort. Wishful thinking leads to errors that may take years to correct. **Please don't do it.** By all means, dig and grow and enjoy your beautiful noids. Put numbers on them in your records. Share them with friends. But please don't try to identify them. Let them be noids!

**For more information:** See “Confirming Identity” elsewhere in this handbook.