

The Guardian Gardener's Handbook: Processing & Shipping Bearded Irises

DONORS, YOU ARE WONDERFUL. Your enthusiasm and generosity help save historic irises by distributing them to other gardeners who love them. Often there is no other known source for an iris. That's huge. Please understand, then, that the following suggestions are given constructively, to help make the GG Share-Outs even better. A healthy rhizome means another historic iris has been preserved.

The Golden Rule of Donating Rhizomes

Donate only rhizomes that you would be willing to adopt yourself. Is the rhizome a reasonable size for that class of iris? Is it healthy? Is it properly named?



TRIMMING

- **Cut fans 6 inches long** for all but the shortest classes. On shorties, trim off any brown tips. If you have leafspot, cut off the diseased parts of the leaves.

- **Remove old bloomstalks.** They're just extra weight for you to ship. Most of the time, they snap off easily at the base; if not, cut off close to the rhizome.

- **Roots — to trim or not to**

trim: Some donors trim the roots to about 4" long to save shipping weight, but some leave them long. We discovered that those long, dry roots (still attached to the rhizomes) actually made good packing material, providing air flow. Interesting idea!

- **If you live east of the Rockies, double-check for borers.** Even if you haven't seen any in your garden, PLEASE check every rhizome before shipping your donation.

WASHING

- **Wash the rhizomes** with a strong stream from a hose and let them dry thoroughly in the shade or early or late sun.

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- **If there is any chance of rhizomes getting mixed in washing, label them first.** See Labeling, below.
- ***Please don't bleach before shipping.*** Bleach is very harsh and hard on the rhizomes. Let the recipient bleach, if desired, right before planting or potting.
- **Make sure rhizomes and fans are completely dry before packing,** or they'll mold or rot in shipment.

LABELING

- **Use a BLACK Sharpie Fine Point.** Ballpoint pen does NOT work. Ultra Fine Sharpie is too fine. Colors other than black are often absorbed by the leaf before the iris is received by the customer.
- **Spread the leaves of the fan. Write on ONE inner leaf, first wiping off the powdery "bloom" so the ink adheres better. Start at the base and write toward the top of the fan. PRINT.** Note how it was done in the photo.
- **Scribblers please note:** For preservation, the name of the iris must be clear.
- **Abbreviations:** We don't expect you to write 'Souvenir de Madame Gaudichau' on every fan. Abbreviate if you must, but make sure we understand what you write, so do include a list of names and abbreviations.
- **A few of our donors staple paper name labels to the iris leaves.** We understand that not everyone can print legibly on the leaf and must use an alternative way of labeling. If you do this, please make sure the papers are stapled firmly and not way out at the tips of the leaves; as the leaf tips dry out, the staples loosen and the labels fall off.

SHIPPING

- **Rhizomes need packing material to keep air moving inside the box; otherwise they mold or rot.** They need some excelsior, clean straw, or crumbled paper in there to give them some air pockets. Cedar shavings used for animal bedding work well and smell good. One clever donor used clean, dry pine needles as packing, which worked great and smelled wonderful.
- **Bundling: If you have several small rhizomes of MDBs, SDBs, or MTBs that you think should be bundled together,** put them in a small paper bag with vent holes cut in it, or use a mesh bag. If you have tiny rhizomes of other classes of bearded, plant them in the ground again and let them grow up.

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- **DO NOT WRAP THE RHIZOMES** in anything, even newspaper. They will mold, every time. **Plastic wrap or bags are the very worst things for them;** the rhizomes will simply rot. Air flow inside the box is key.
- **Print your NAME & ADDRESS on the outside of every box;** not just your address, please.
- **Ship Priority Mail** (NOT Express, which is hideously expensive) and send on a Monday or Tuesday for fastest arrival. Keep the tracking number
- **Email the recipient** when you have mailed the package.
- **Relax - you've earned it. You've just helped save an endangered iris by sharing it.**