

## **Guardian Gardens: Frequently Asked Questions**

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### **What is the Guardian Gardens network?**

The Guardian Gardens network is a group of HIPS members devoted to saving, growing for increase, and sharing rare identified irises in every class. These are the irises most in danger of becoming extinct.

We are also working with botanical gardens that share the goal of saving irises. Our goal is to have each cultivar growing in at least five locations (in addition to the botanical gardens) on any continent, preferably scattered across climatic zones and regions. We want a steady population at the ready to replenish individual losses before they compound into extinctions. Ultimately, we would like to see as many rare irises as possible available once again from commercial sources.

### **How do you determine which irises belong in the GG network?**

In a word, rarity. We compare the number of commercial sellers who offer an iris for sale and the number of gardens we know the cultivar to be growing in. At this time, to enter the Guardian Gardens program, an identified cultivar has to be offered by no more than two sellers, and be growing in no more than four HIPS gardens. We're also on the hunt for irises growing in far fewer places. You'll see us referring to 0-0s, the irises that are held in no nurseries and no recorded gardens. Those are the ones on the verge of disappearing, if they are not already gone.

These are imperfect measures. Nurseries don't always tell HIPS what they have, and only one-fifth of HIPS members are currently reporting their collections. We use the newest version of the Member Databank, which is updated yearly. As more HIPS members share their iris lists with the Databank Chair our numbers will become more accurate

### **What do GG members do?**

Participants in the program agree to care for these rare irises, work to confirm their identity, protect them in beds that are secure (beds that the public does not visit), make annual reports of the rarities in their care to the program's administrator (who reports back to the membership so we all can see what's happening across the program), and share divisions of their treasures with GG members.

### **Where do you get the GG irises?**

First, many HIPS members are growing rare irises in their gardens and might not even know it. We also search out rare irises. In the program's first two years of

existence, focused purchases, rescues from private gardens, and exchanges with botanical institutions yielded more than 1,600 irises — or a collection equal to or surpassing those of the Missouri Botanical Garden and the Presby Memorial Iris Garden, the two largest public collections in North America. Our collection is simply scattered across multiple locations.

### **Aren't the GG members just joining to hoard irises?**

Hoarding is the opposite of what we do. The entire purpose of the GG program comes down to three words: *protect and share*. Sure, the GG members have various iris collections, as do most HIPS members. But their reason for joining is to share those irises so they don't disappear. By doing it initially within the GG program, we know where those irises are; as their numbers increase to safe populations, the irises are re-introduced at no cost to botanical institutions and to the commercial trade for all to enjoy.

### **I don't have room for a lot of irises. Can I still join?**

You can be a Guardian Gardener with just a few rare irises in a little bed or in pots on a balcony. The number of GGers is growing at a pace of about one new member per week. This is good, as the number of irises in the program is also growing, as more irises become historic every year. We do our best to make sure our irises are correctly identified, as this core of gardens is the last defense against an iris's disappearance.

### **Who gets the rhizomes when the irises are ready to divide?**

Once your garden has more than four big, healthy rhizomes of a cultivar, we ask that you make extras available to other GGers, with each recipient paying the postage costs for whatever he or she receives. Once the cultivar is growing in at least five Guardian Gardens, your increase can be shared with botanical gardens, the HIPS Rhizome Sale, and/or local iris societies. It's relatively secure by that time, and we'll want to disseminate it more widely.

### **How do I track and report my GG irises?**

We have record-keeping forms available for download on the HIPS website that you may use to track your irises. Many members prefer to keep their records on their computer, using a spreadsheet. Once a year we report the GG irises we hold to our data collections assistant, so an annual census can be compiled.

### **How do I protect my privacy?**

We don't share your name or location with anyone, so every participant's identity

and garden are secure. On the HIPS website, only the aggregate number of Guardian Gardens holding any variety will be revealed.

GG members allow their identities to be known to the other GG members, so they can converse about the program. GG members are not made public, however.

### **I want to help. How can I become a Guardian Gardener?**

You do need to be a gardener. If you have experience growing irises, we have GG irises waiting to be adopted. If you are less experienced but are willing to learn, you can still be a valuable member. Interest and enthusiasm come from the heart; growing irises is a skill that can be learned. Email Nancy McDonald, the Guardian Gardens Administrator, at [gg@historicism.org](mailto:gg@historicism.org) and let her know you want to be a Guardian Gardener. And please, help us spread the word. GGers must be HIPS members, but the cost of HIPS membership is very reasonable. You can make a difference. Together we can save these rare beauties before they are gone forever.

For more information, read the *Guardian Gardener's Handbook*, available free on the HIPS website, [www.historicism.org](http://www.historicism.org).