

HOW TO DIG, DIVIDE & PROCESS IRIS

by Rae Phillips, July 2018

Irises should be dug and divided every 2 to 4 years, depending on how thick the clump becomes. Digging is best done with forked spade, but shovel works too. Try to work around the outside edges of the clumps, lifting as you go, until you can pull clump out of ground with hands. The clump may look like a gnarly mess, but there IS logic to it.



In the center is the “mother rhizome,” which in many cases will not have any growth coming from it,

looking like a “potato,” with other smaller potatoes attached (with leaves). Here’s a sub-group broken away from the original clump.

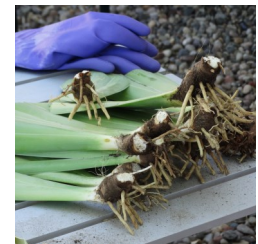


Starting from the outside working in, start breaking apart the clump into separate rhizomes (“potatoes”)

Any rhizome with blossom stalk attached will not bloom again and is discarded, as well as any rhizome without any leaves coming from it. In photo at right, the center rhizome is old bloom stalk and is discarded.



For ease in handling and replanting, trim leaves and roots as shown below. If you want to keep track of varieties, label each rhizome with its name (use magic marker), or keep varieties separated into paper bags.



It is recommended that rhizomes then be washed (kitchen dish brush works well), and sanitized (1 cup bleach to 5-gal water). It only takes soaking a few minutes, but no harm if left a little longer. This will remove any possible disease that was on the original plant. Lay them out to dry. They are then ready to replant! It is recommended they be replanted within a week to ten days, if you hope to have blossoms the following spring.

For best results, add mushroom compost and high-phosphate fertilizer & turn into soil before replanting. All new growth comes from the “heel” of rhizome (where the leaves are), so allow space for expansion in that direction when planting. The rhizome should be planted very close to surface with just enough covering to hold it in place.