

# Wenke Wisdom

## Japanese Iris

Irises (EYE-riss-ez) are one of the delights of spring. These striking, colorful perennials are usually categorized as hardy spring bulbs because of their plant structure. Like tulips, daffodils and crocuses, irises grow from bulb-like roots, which, in the case of irises, are called rhizomes. Some iris are described as being “bearded”, which refers to the fuzzy strip of tissue that decorates the falling petals of the flowers. Many others are “beardless”, their flowers having smooth falling petals. These types tend to offer fewer flower colors, but are hardy and exotic looking. Japanese Iris (*Iris kaempferi*) are among the favorite beardless types because of their wonderful large flowers and *their tolerance of shade*. They have been lovingly bred for generations in Japan and China and are highly valued here too. They are easy to grow and have few pests.

### Height and Spread of Japanese Iris

Japanese irises grow from 2 to 4 feet high. After two or three years, a clump of irises spreads to 3 feet or more.

### Japanese Iris flowers

Japanese iris flowers are enormous; the largest may reach 10 inches across. They **bloom** at the tips of sturdy stems in **midsummer for several weeks**. Available in white, pink, and shades of blue and purple, some varieties are speckled, marbled or streaked. Flowers may be single or double. Single blooms resemble butterflies, their 3 overlapping large petals, called “falls” spread like wings and their 3 smaller petals, or standards, standing erect. Double flowers have flaring, overlapping petals, and some bloom which resemble peonies have 9 – 12 petals.

### Japanese Iris Foliage

Japanese iris leaves are quite narrow, almost grass-like. These smooth, green blades grow directly from the rhizome at the soil surface 3 or 4 feet tall, providing texture and drama in the garden all season long.