

# A Guide to Bearded Irises: Cultivating the Rainbow for Beginners and Enthusiasts

*Kelly Norris*

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## A Guide to Bearded Irises

**Cultivating the Rainbow**  
FOR BEGINNERS AND ENTHUSIASTS



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**Kelly Norris : A Guide to Bearded Irises: Cultivating the Rainbow for Beginners and Enthusiasts** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Guide to Bearded Irises: Cultivating the Rainbow for Beginners and Enthusiasts:

25 of 25 people found the following review helpful. much-needed guide to an important group of garden perennials By Tom L. Waters I've been an iris enthusiast for over 35 years, and there is a scarcity of good books for the gardener who wants to learn what types of cultivars are available and how to grow them. Books on the genus *Iris* tend to be technical rather than horticultural in their emphasis, like Brian Mathew's botanical survey of the genus. The American Iris Society book *The World of Irises* has many chapters devoted to the history of the improvement of irises by breeding, which is more than most gardeners want or need. In any case, that book is quite dated now. *A Guide to Bearded Irises* is the work of Kelly D. Norris, a dedicated iris enthusiast and rising star in the world of horticulture. As the title says, the scope of the book is limited to the bearded irises, from the tiny miniature dwarfs to the tall bearded. So arilbreds and beardless types such as Siberians and Louisians are not included. Bearded irises are the most widely grown type, and provide more than enough material for a book of this size. The information on how to grow bearded irises is thorough and accurate. For completeness, there is a chapter on known pests and diseases of irises, although Norris asserts (quite fairly, in my experience) that properly grown irises seldom experience many of these

problems. There is a chapter on hybridizing irises for those readers who are curious about this activity. (Most of our current cultivars were produced through the efforts of hobbyist hybridizers.) There's also a welcome chapter on common "myths" about irises (such as the idea that they spontaneously "revert" to a different color after a few years). But the meat of this book is the description of recommended cultivars in each of the six bearded iris classes, each accompanied by large, beautiful photographs. With tens of thousands of bearded irises to choose from, it's not easy to narrow things down to a number that conveniently fit into a book like this one. Conventional wisdom says that listing recommended cultivars in a book on irises is foolish, because it will make the book seem quite dated after a few years have past. Although this can't really be denied, it's not right to simply give up on the task, either. A gardener who picks up a book devoted to a group of plants expects to learn what sort of cultivars are available and what their merits are. Although Norris's choices emphasize irises that have come into commerce in the last 20 years or so, he also includes a fair number of irises of earlier vintage, providing a balance of old and new that makes the lists seem more than just an homage to the fashions of the moment. Even if you are not looking for irises to put on your shopping list, the splendid photos and descriptions do a wonderful job of bringing each class of iris to life and conveying their range and potential. Although an unabashed iris enthusiast, Norris is also a gardener with wide interests, and the book contains many welcome ideas on using the different types of irises in garden design and in association with other plants. I can't think of another iris book that offers more than a hand wave or two on this important subject. Norris's book is not just speaking to the cognoscenti of the iris world, but also to avid gardeners of all levels of experience who are drawn to irises and want to incorporate them into their gardens. Norris's enthusiasm for his subject is catching, and his style is friendly and conversational without ever seeming glib. I found a few statements I might quibble with on a technical level, but nothing of practical consequence. Even as a seasoned iris grower, this book gave me new ideas and a good look at many different irises I have not had opportunity to grow myself. I can recommend this without reservation for anyone who has taken a fancy to the bearded irises and wants a reliable guide to their culture, garden uses, and vast variety of form and color.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Gorgeous photos  
By Customer  
A very good book, but more for Intermediate and up iris lovers. Kelly's love is for breeding iris and it shows. However, most folks just want to plant iris in their gardens for their beauty and want most information on that. He does give good culture points, but I personally could do without the garden design suggestions. Overall, a bit repetitive, but I still like the book very much. A good reference to have if you are a true iris lover and not just a casual gardener.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Over the RAINBOW-we fly with irises  
By Rodja NZ  
What an exciting book; written by a knowledgeable 25 year old. So interesting, colourful and informative on his subject. Not only is he a great writer but also an accomplished photographer. The photos alone represent the best irises available today and he even goes further to show promising seedlings from the top US breeders, and a Aussie. All classes of the bearded irises are beautifully described. A well produced book for us global readers and I can recommend this book to anyone with an interest in irises. Well done Kelly D Norris.

The diversity of bearded irises rivals that of any other perennial grown in temperate climates. For some gardeners, they bring back warm memories of a grandparent's garden; for others, they're a cutting-edge plant with a seemingly endless capacity for producing new forms and patterns. As the manager of Rainbow Iris Farm and co-editor of the Bulletin of the American Iris Society, Kelly Norris is the authority on gardening with bearded irises. His introductory chapters offer tips for successful growth, garden design, plant selection, and "creating" new irises. *A Guide to Bearded Irises* also provides portraits of the most outstanding plants in each of the six recognized categories, from the dainty miniature dwarf bearded irises to the stately tall bearded irises. A resource section lists specialty nurseries, organizations devoted to bearded irises, and public gardens with notable iris collections.

Norris is a charming guide. It's difficult not to be seduced by his enthusiasm and tantalizing descriptions of the colors, textures, ruffles, and patterns of the iris species. Publishers Weekly  
A green thumbs up, especially as this is a fresh, timely, and appealing presentation of the topic. Library Journal  
A handsome book. Country Gardens  
Comprehensive and up-to-date, all the while brimming with an enthusiasm that is exhilarating, inspiring. American Gardener  
[Norris] is an enthusiastic young American who writes in a readable style with his passion for irises coming across on each page. The Garden  
Norris will offer fresh inspiration, as well as growing tips and descriptions of recommended cultivars. NJ.com  
It's a rainbow of a book, with deliciously coloured section pages and graphics that mark it out as having a modern approach to this potentially old-fashioned flower. The Independent