

Learning about the Louisiana Iris *Iris brevicaulis*, *I. fulva*, *I. giganticaerulea*, *I. hexagona*, *I. nelsonii*



The Louisiana irises include five different species and are native to southern Louisiana and the Gulf coast. The five species are all herbaceous perennials that grow dormant in the winter and bloom in April.

Characteristics. Louisiana iris belong to the group of beardless irises. The flower has six wide petals and can be red, purple, blue, yellow, white, and sometimes bi- or tri-colored. The foliage of the plant is narrow and sword-like. Louisiana iris is three to four feet tall and three feet wide. The Louisiana iris prefers wet soils and can grow in standing water. All five species are very closely related and will interbreed.

Geographic Range. *I. brevicaulis* and *I. fulva* are native to the Mississippi River Valley from Ohio to Louisiana. *I. giganticaerulea* and *I. hexagona* are found along the coast from Mississippi to Texas. All five species are only found together in southern Louisiana. The irises grow best in wet areas like swamps or even roadside ditches.

Additional Information.

- The name *iris* is derived from Greek mythology: Iris was the goddess of the rainbow.
- *Les gles de marais* is the name they were called by the early French settlers who found them growing abundantly in the marshes of south Louisiana. In translation, it means “the glads of the marsh,” which is a reference to their broad range of vibrant color.
- The Louisiana iris is also the official State wildflower.
- Various types of insects and caterpillars feed on Louisiana irises.
- Louisiana iris will tolerate a wide range of moisture conditions and do not have to be grown associated with ponds or standing water. They will survive periodic drought, although dry periods will affect their ability to bloom. It is recommended that they be well mulched.
- Louisiana iris can grow in a wide variety of soils, from heavy clay soil to soils with high organic content. They do not do as well in sandy soil unless they receive adequate water.
- Because of their fast growth rate in ideal conditions (moist soil and full sun), Louisiana irises are best planted at least two feet apart. Their rhizomes can grow as long as eight inches in a single growing season!
- Because of their rapid growth, Louisiana iris need to be thinned every couple of years.
- Louisiana iris needs lots of nutrients, so it is best to fertilize them with a balanced fertilizer (13-13-13) in the fall and again in the spring with a fertilizer higher in phosphorus (10-20-10).



Photo by Anita Granger Swan

References:

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