

Dividing Siberian Iris

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edited by Harriet Robinson)*



Overgrown Siberian irises can be difficult to divide, but doing so will eliminate an empty center portion (as the rhizomes grow outward, a “donut hole” appears) and will rejuvenate the plant. Lifting the plant with shovel or a fork can take several times loosening the perimeter and additional help underground where roots have grown away from the main clump.

Once out, or even while still in the ground, two back-to-back spading forks inserted together can be used to pry the rhizomes and roots apart. Discard the old center section by cutting the rhizomes and make divisions of 2 to 4 fans from the newer rhizomes around the perimeter. Repot the divisions as soon as possible. Cut back the leaves about 6 inches.

Unlike bearded iris rhizomes, Siberians should not be allowed to dry out. When replanting in the garden, plant Siberian irises at least an inch deep, often deeper than when potted, and water well. They like a sunny location and mulch is helpful. Keep Siberian irises watered for the season as they establish new roots. Like other perennials, they may take a year to establish before rewarding you with a floral display. If a Siberian is not overgrown, it may be possible to get a small division from the outside of a clump without removing the entire plant from the ground. Pot it up and keep it watered.

Daylilies are dug in a similar fashion although they do not get a donut center. They do not have to be potted for auction. It is best if you trim the foliage on the daylilies back to about 6-8 inches above the crown (where the leaves meet the roots). Wash the soil away from the roots and place the root portion of the plant in a plastic bag that may be held in place with an elastic band. Do not bring any plants in water because of the carpeted floor at the church.

Hostas are dug the same way, but like Siberian irises, they should be potted.

Peonies do not require the division that irises do to look their best, but dividing is the way to propagate them and can help if they are growing poorly or need to

be moved for whatever reason. Lifting them with a fork reveals their fleshy roots. Rinsing the dirt off helps to see the eyes. Use a knife and cut to make divisions with 3 to 5 eyes. Cut the stems to remove the foliage. You can store the divisions in peat moss, or dry potting soil, until planting. They do not need to be potted for auction. Bagging them can help prevent eye damage.

The best time for planting bare root Japanese irises is during the spring. However, if you have some Japanese irises that have been potted for some time and have developed good root systems; please contribute them to the auction.

Shrub divisions such as named lilac cultivars are also good sellers.