

## Fall Iris Garden Maintenance

*(From the Maine Iris Society Newsletter, October 2018*

*This article by Ted White is reprinted from the October 2014 newsletter)*

October is an important month in the life of Maine iris gardens. It is time, once again, to begin cleaning up the garden in preparation for the colder months that will surely follow. In mid to late October it will be time to cut the foliage back on your bearded irises to about 4-5" above the tops of the rhizomes. This can improve the overall health of your garden next season by removing leaves that may be covered with leaf spot. Trimming back the foliage can greatly reduce the number of leaf spot spores that will be present the following season. It is recommended that you place the cut foliage in a plastic bag and discard with the trash. We recommend that you do not place diseased foliage on your compost pile; this would allow leaf spot spores to be added to the garden once again when you use the compost.



A bearded iris fan cut back for the winter. Note the new growth that has started.



Siberian iris has been cut back for the winter.

Siberian and Japanese irises may be cut back close ground level. If their foliage is free from disease, you could chop up the foliage with a leaf shredder or mulching lawn mower and place it on the compost pile.

If your iris garden soil needs an application of dolomitic limestone, fall is the perfect time to spread lime throughout the bearded iris garden. We find that the limestone in powdered form works more quickly than that which comes pelletized. Bearded irises like a soil pH of 6.0 – 6.8. If your soil tests out below 6.0 pH, it would be appropriate to add lime to your bearded iris soil this fall. Do not add lime to your beardless irises (Siberian and Japanese) iris plantings. Siberian and Japanese irises like acid soil and do not want any lime. Remember not to give your irises any fertilizer in October. This is the time of year when

they begin hardening off for the winter. Fertilizer would only encourage them to continue sending up new growth and may make the irises more susceptible to rot over the winter months.

Remember, in mid-November to cover your tall bearded irises with Reemay or what many garden centers call floating row covers. Floating row covers will not only keep the beds clean throughout the winter, but much more importantly, they will protect your iris rhizomes from rot that sometimes plagues tall bearded irises as they emerge in the spring. Row covers are especially good for use on any new tall bearded irises that you have added to the garden this season. This is especially helpful if you have several new irises that you have purchased from the West Coast.

*(Editor's note: many of us skip the row cover if we are growing hardy bearded iris. Some members who have had trouble with rot have had success covering their irises.)*