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Belton Iris Show



Colleen Barnes smells irises at an iris show at Master Gardener Show Barn in Belton on Saturday.

## Eye-catching irises on display

BY LARRY CAUSEY

TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

BELTON — “This is like the perfect flower for Texas,” said Karen Woods, president of Belton Iris Society, during the 2015 Iris Show on Saturday at the Bell County Master Gardeners building in Belton.

“They do not like to sit in water,” she said.

The hardy, beautifully flowering perennial — which comes in more than 87 varieties — is not only drought-resistant, she said. People in Morgan’s Point are glad that it also is deer-resistant, she said.

“What normally happens, is a raccoon, armadillo or deer will pull one of two up, and then leave them alone,” she said. “They don’t like the taste.”

While irises may not be good for wild animals to eat, Woods and her fellow iris-lovers highly recommend that people learn how to better cultivate them.

“I would just love it if I could get more people to put these in their yard,” she said. “It just brings joy to your life.”

The Belton club, which started in 1951, has about 25 members, she said. It is part of the American Iris Society, and its annual show draws horticulturists from afar. The Best of Show iris, for example, was shown by D. Boyle of Pflugerville. Woods said there were entries from Fort Worth, Waco, Georgetown, Round Rock and Austin.

One of the new additions to this year’s show was the photography contest, she said. First place

winner in that division was Jim Landers of Temple, who farms in Lometa.

He named his hybridized Louisiana iris "Lady of Lometa."

He's been growing irises for at least 30 years, he said.

"They're easy to grow, but there is maintenance involved," he said. "There's always something to do."

After three or four years, a clump has to be thinned out, he said. "They get too crowded."

"They basically do not like water," he said.

"Too little water is better than too much water. My big bed of irises, I water maybe once a month."

When hybridizing, he said, he tries to beat the bees. He uses a pair of tweezers to pollinate the plants. From pollination until a new plant is ready for market could be 10 years, he said. It might be several years before the plant blooms. Then the grower must weed out the bad plants and replant the good ones.

"I probably have 100 Lady of Lometas," he said.

Woods said all of the club members grow their own irises, and will be putting 400 iris rhizomes on sale at the Bell County Expo Center, April 17-18. The group favors rebloomers, which are irises that bloom two or even three times a year, she said.

"We want to make sure they're healthy, they're strong," she said. "If you give irises proper growing conditions, they'll be absolutely gorgeous when they bloom," she said.



*Michael Miller/Telegram*

A close look at one of the irises on display at an iris show at the Bell County Master Gardeners building in Belton.