

# Dietes vegeta African Iris, Butterfly Iris<sup>1</sup>

Edward F. Gilman, Ryan W. Klein, and Gail Hansen<sup>2</sup>

#### Introduction

This clumping, robust perennial has stiff leaves radiating up and out in a fan-shaped pattern. The flower spikes are topped with 3inch white flowers marked with yellow and blue. Although short-lived (about 2 days), the flowers are produced sporadically throughout the year, especially in spring and early summer. Plants grow to 4 or 5 feet tall in standing water, making it ideal for water gardens and wet soil. They reach about 2 to 3 feet in soil. African iris is also attractive when used as an accent planted in a shorter groundcover.



Figure 1. Full Form - *Dietes vegeta*: African Iris, Butterfly Iris Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Flower - *Dietes vegeta*: African Iris, Butterfly Iris Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

### **General Information**

Scientific name: Dietes vegeta

**Pronunciation:** dye-EE-teez VEDGE-jet-tuh

**Common name(s):** African iris, butterfly iris

**Family:** *Iridaceae* 

Plant type: herbaceous; ornamental grass

**USDA hardiness zones:** 8B through 11 (Figure 3)

**Planting month for zone 8:** year round

- 1. This document is FPS179, one of a series of the Department of Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised October 2023. Visit the EDIS website at https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu for the currently supported version of this publication.
- 2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Department of Environmental Horticulture; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. For more information on obtaining other UF/IFAS Extension publications, contact your county's UF/IFAS Extension office.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Andra Johnson, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round

Origin: not native to North America

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Uses:** border; mass planting; container or above ground planter; naturalizing; water garden; accent; suitable for growing indoors

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

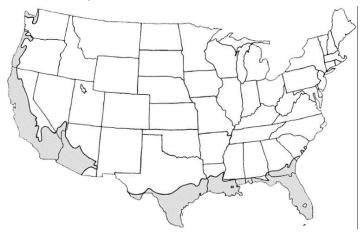


Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

# Description

Height: 2 to 6 feet

Spread: 1 to 2 feet

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: fine

### **Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** most emerge from the soil, usually without a stem

**Leaf type:** simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: linear

Leaf venation: parallel

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: 18 to 36 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

#### **Flower**

Flower color: white

Flower characteristic: flowers periodically throughout the

year

#### **Fruit**

Fruit shape: elongated

Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: green

Fruit characteristic: persists on the plant

#### **Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** typically multi-trunked or clumping

stems

Current year stem/twig color: not applicable

Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

#### **Culture**

**Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun

**Soil tolerances:** extended flooding; slightly alkaline; clay;

sand; acidic; loam

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

Soil salt tolerances: poor

Plant spacing: 24 to 36 inches

#### Other

Roots: not applicable

**Winter interest:** plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

## **Use and Management**

African iris will bloom best on rich, moist soil but will tolerate moderately dry soil conditions, growing in full sun to partial shade. Plants in the full sun or in sandy soil grow best with regular and frequent irrigation. Cold temperatures (below 25°F) cause leaf browning. These leaves can be removed in the spring to clean up the plant. Otherwise, African iris requires no maintenance except for a light fertilization or two each year. Frequent fertilization increases growth rate, foliage color and flower production.

The cultivar 'Johnsonii' has larger leaves and flowers.

Propagation is by seed or division of the matted clumps. Whole plants are lifted, and the rhizomes divided every three years or when new plants are needed.

#### **Pests and Diseases**

Nematodes are the main pest problem. No other problems appear to affect this durable plant.

No diseases are of major concern.