

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

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## Introduction

This clumping, robust perennial has stiff leaves radiating up and out in a fan-shaped pattern. The flower spikes are topped with 3-inch 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

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**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.