

# *Iris virginica* Virginia Iris, Blue Flag, Blue Flag Iris<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Blue flag iris has wonderfully textured, light-green foliage emerging directly from the ground in dense clumps. It grows 12 to 18 inches tall, producing lavender-blue flowers about 4 inches across in the spring. Flowers are displayed in a showy fashion slightly above the foliage. They are native to boggy areas where water stands all year long. They will grow in standing water.



Figure 1. Full Form—*Iris virginica*: Blue flag, blue flag iris.  
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS



Figure 2. Flower—*Iris virginica*: Blue flag, blue flag iris.  
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Iris virginica*

**Pronunciation:** EYE-riss vur-JIN-nick-uh

**Common name(s):** Virginia iris, blue flag, blue flag iris

**Family:** *Iridaceae*

**Plant type:** herbaceous; ornamental grass; aquatic plant

**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:** native to Florida

**Invasive potential:** aggressive, spreading plant

**Uses:** border; mass planting; container or above-ground planter; naturalizing; water garden; accent

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 3. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

## Description

**Height:** 4 to 7 feet

**Spread:** 1 to 3 feet

**Plant habit:** upright

**Plant density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** moderate

**Texture:** coarse

## 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:** blue

**Flower characteristic:** spring flowering

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** elongated

**Fruit length:** 0.5 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:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding plant:** not particularly outstanding

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

## Use and Management

The plant is grown and used for its foliage effect as well as the flower display. The plant flowers for a short period in the spring but the coarse-textured, upright foliage makes this a year-round favorite for a wet garden spot. It is well suited for planting in mass in front of a shrub border, or as a tall ground cover. On 2-foot centers, a thick ground cover can be formed in about 2 years. The individual plants will be nearly indistinguishable by that time.

Although full sun is tolerated if soils stay moist, a well-drained, partially shaded location provides the best habitat for *Iris*. Plants can be allowed to dry out slightly in a shaded location with little damage to foliage or flowers. As with other irises, over-fertilization will encourage foliage growth at the expense of flowers. A light application once each year should be enough to maintain good growth and a reliable flower display.

## Pests and Diseases

No major pest or diseases problems are usually encountered on this iris.