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DIVIDING IRIS

Bearded irises are well adapted to Kansas and multiply quickly. After several years, the centers of the clumps tend to lose vigor, and flowering occurs toward the outside. Dividing iris every three to five years will help rejuvenate the planting and increase flowering. Iris may be divided from late July through August, but late July through early August is ideal. Because iris clumps are fairly shallow, it is easy to dig up the entire clump. The root system of the plant consists of thick rhizomes and smaller feeder roots. Use a sharp knife to cut the rhizomes apart so each division consists of a fan of leaves and a section of rhizome. The best divisions are made from a double fan that consists of two small rhizomes attached to a larger one, which forms a Y-shaped division. Each of these small rhizomes has a fan of leaves. The rhizomes that do not split produce single fans. The double fans are preferred because they produce more flowers the first year after planting. Single fans take a year to build up strength. Rhizomes that show signs of damage due to iris borers or soft rot may be discarded, but you may want to physically remove borers from rhizomes and replant if the damage is not severe. It is possible to treat mild cases of soft rot by scraping out the affected tissue, allowing it to dry in the sun and dipping it in a 10 percent solution of household bleach. Make the bleach solution by mixing one-part bleach with nine parts water. Rinse the treated rhizomes with water and allow them to dry before replanting.

Cut the leaves back by two-thirds before replanting. Prepare the soil by removing weeds and fertilizing. Fertilize according to soil test recommendations or by applying a complete fertilizer, such as a 10-10-10, at the rate of 1 pound per 100 square feet. Mix the fertilizer into the soil to a depth of 6 inches. Be wary of using a complete fertilizer in areas that have been fertilized heavily in the past. A growing number of soil tests show high levels of phosphorus. In such cases, use a fertilizer that has a much higher first number (nitrogen) than second (phosphorus).

Peonies with the "Measles" and Powdery Mildew

The weather has resulted in many peonies catching the "measles" and/or powdery mildew.

Measles: Measles is a disease, also known as red spot, that causes distinct, reddish-purple spots on the upper leaf surfaces. These spots often coalesce and become large, reddish purple blotches on the upper leaf surfaces but are a light brown color when viewed from the underside of the leaves. The spots on stems will merge and form streaks that are reddish brown.

Powdery Mildew: Plants infected with powdery mildew look like they have been dusted with flour and can lead to death of the leaves. This disease is more rare in Kansas than Measles but does show up at times. Sanitation is the best control for both these diseases. Remove all diseased tissue, including stems, at the end of the growing season. Actually, the foliage can be removed in mid-August with no harm to the plants as the plants will be essentially dormant. Foliage that has

already died should be removed now. Mulch that contains plant debris should also be discarded and then replaced with fresh mulch. Reducing the source of the inoculum will reduce the chances of another severe outbreak next year.

Trees Losing Leaves

Before we get into leaf loss, we should also touch on scorch. The hot, drying winds this summer have resulted in some trees suffering scorch where the outer edge of the leaf and/or the area between veins turning brown. This is caused by the tree not being able to take up enough water to replace that lost through transpiration. This is especially common on maples. Though the tree does not look good, the effect on health is minimal as long as the tree is watered as needed. There are three situations that can cause leaf loss. If falling leaves are well distributed throughout the tree and result in a general thinning of the leaves, the problem is not serious. Trees will often set more leaves in the spring than they can support during the summer. Heat and drought stress will cause the tree to lose leaves that it cannot support with the available soil moisture. Leaves that drop are most often yellow with no discernible disease spots. However, at times, we can have green leaves drop that appear perfectly healthy. As long as the leaf drop results in a gradual thinning of the leaves, the tree should be fine if it is kept watered during dry periods. In some cases we may see virtually all of the leaves drop. Certain trees such as hackberry can drop all of the leaves and enter summer dormancy. Trees that are summer dormant should have supple twigs and healthy buds. Usually, the effect on the health of the tree is very minor and the tree leafs out normally next spring. As long as the tree has enough stored energy reserves to make it through to next spring, it will survive. The twigs and buds tell the story. If the buds die and the twigs become brittle, at least that part of the tree is dead. The last case involves trees that have leaves that die and remain attached to the tree. This can happen seemingly overnight. In such cases, the tree couldn't keep up with moisture demands and died quickly. This year, the cause may be due to winter damage. The warm, exceptionally dry winter interspersed with cold snaps, resulted in damage to the tree. As in the last case, the twigs and buds are the most important clue as to the health of the tree. As long as the buds are alive and the twigs are supple, do not remove the tree, it still has life.

When to Harvest Grapes

It takes more than color to determine when to harvest grapes. Grapes often are fully colored before they are fully ripe. Look for a whitish coating on the fruit and look for the seeds to change from green to brown. The final test is to taste the berries for sweetness. Grapes don't continue to ripen once they are removed from the vine so be sure the quality is there before harvesting.

We have seen uneven ripening on grapes this year with some berries remaining green while the majority of the cluster being fully ripe. Concord grapes tend to have this problem in most years but other varieties are being affected this year. This is likely due to the excessive heat we have experienced this summer. Once harvested, grapes can be stored for up to eight weeks if kept at 32 degrees with 85 percent relative humidity. Other attractive options are available as well including making juice, jellies, jams and wine.

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