

# Doubling irises

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**I**rises, named for the ancient Greek goddess of the rainbow, grace many Montana landscapes, and why not? The many types and colors are enough to keep anyone entertained throughout the growing season, and those with roots and shoots that grow underground are easily grown in most of the state.

Many of us go hog-wild tucking irises into every available corner of the yard.

You can double, or even triple, your gardening pleasure by gently digging up the underground shoots, known as rhizomes. This produces plants that are genetically identical to the parent and helps alleviate overcrowding.

Divide irises every two to four years, immediately after flowering. Carefully dig up the plants and cut off the old portions of the rhizome.

The healthy part will be succulent and firm, while the dead and dying portions will be brown and shriveled.

Cut the vigorous rhizomes into pieces containing at least one lateral bud. There should be four to six leaves attached to the healthy pieces. This is called the foliage fan.

Shorten the leaves of the foliage fan by half.

Prepare the soil in your iris bed with plenty of organic matter, and add a phosphorous fertilizer prior to planting. Make a mound in the middle of the hole, so that the mound's top is level with the surrounding soil line.

Place the rhizome on the mound, and spread the roots around the mound. Fill the hole with good soil, and water well to be sure there are no air pockets.

Plant newly purchased rhizomes in early July in Montana. Rhizomes you get from your best buddy should be treated with a fungicide/insecticide prior to planting to be sure you are not transplanting pests.

Fertilize irises with a low nitrogen fertilizer twice a year, being sure to place the fertilizer next to, and not directly on, the rhizomes.

Irises give a strong vertical accent to any landscape and can be massed or used as individual specimens.

For publications and information on gardening in Montana, contact your county or reservation MSU Extension office, or visit [www.msuextension.org](http://www.msuextension.org)



*An iris bed anchors a corner in a landscaping arrangement with an antique stove behind. During the long blooming period of the iris, the delicate, complex blossom steals the eye.*



*The rhizomes and foliage fan of an iris ready to transplant.*