

Iris Issues



Hi-Yield®

ferti-lome Info Sheet

ferti-lome

Iris is a very popular perennial, it is easy to grow, reliable and hardy. In fact, many abandoned farmsteads still have irises that bloom. Many problems with iris are caused or increased by our actions; overwatering, overfertilizing, planting too deep, not dividing when needed and poor sanitation (cleaning up dead plant material in fall).

We will start with iris borer (see left image). This caterpillar overwinters as eggs on old iris leaves and weed debris. In early spring they hatch and climb up new foliage, chew a hole and tunnel into the leaf and feed downward toward the rhizome. By the time they reach the rhizome they are almost 2 inches and can cause major damage. In the early summer they move to the soil, pupate and later emerge as a moth (see right image), and lay eggs on old foliage and weeds.

In the third image we see yellow, then brown streaks on the leaves, indicating borer damage. You can dig up the rhizome and explore the leaves to hand eliminate the borer. Most universities recommend systemic insecticides, so the best choice is the *FL 2-N-1 Systemic*, this will help with fungus issues listed below as well. If an organic approach is wanted, *NG Spinosad* applied when the foliage is 4 to 6 inches and repeat in 10 to 14 days will catch many of the borers. The final control is remove all weeds and dead foliage in the fall.

Damage by the borer often leads to the next issue, bacterial soft rot see right tuber in image →. This causes a foul smelling decay of the leaves and rhizomes, leaves often separate easily from the rhizome. Heavy infestation can kill plants, these rhizomes should be discarded. To save others, remove the rotted areas and dip in a solution of *NG Copper Soap*, then allow them to dry before re-planting. You may want to dip your knife in the solution between cuts to disinfect.

Another common issue is iris leaf spot (see images →). This fungus occurs during wet periods during the spring, causing typical leaf spot symptoms, spots with reddish-brown margins. Although it will rarely kill a plant, repeated attacks can reduce plant vigor, making it susceptible to other issues. Spray with *FL Broad Spectrum Fungicide* all universities recommend the addition of *HY Spreader Sticker* to make it effective due to the waxy nature of the leaves. *NG Copper Soap* offers an organic option or the *FL 2-N-1 Systemic* will work.

Finally, I have mentioned sanitation a number of times, removing dead plant material and weeds from the iris bed are very important. Broadleaf weeds will need to be hand-pulled, but the main problem in iris beds, are grasses (see images →). Apply *FL Over the Top II* or *HY Grass Killer* with the addition of *HY Spreader Sticker* to kill the grass without harming the iris plants. Prevent new weeds by applying *HY Turf & Ornamental 2* or 3 times a year.

