

Black Gamecock, a Louisiana Iris

growing a Southern iris, where summers are short and winters are cold

I purchased Black Gamecock many years ago because it was touted as the hardiest of the Louisiana iris hybrids. It is a rich blue-black color with a brilliant streak of yellow on the falls. Louisiana iris are beardless with sword-like foliage and blooms late-spring into early summer.



Black Gamecock, hybrid Louisiana iris

These irises are considered true water iris but are adaptable to gardens if given adequate moisture, according to the Louisiana Iris Society website. They are available in a diverse palette of colors including blue, black, red, yellow, pink, gold, brown, lavender, burgundy, white and some bi-colors.

There are five species of Louisiana iris. Only Louisiana is home to all five. They grow wild in moist areas such as roadside ditches and bogs from the lower Mississippi River Valley down to the gulf coast states, Texas to Florida, and up the east coast into South Carolina. They have naturally hybridized in their native range. Plant breeders have created the hybrids of today from the original species.



Black Gamecock growing solo in a jardiniere on our deck

Pursuing some websites selling Louisiana iris, Black Gamecock is the only variety I found that is consistently rated hardy in zone 4. The Louisiana Iris Society says ‘hybrid Louisiana Iris are hardy throughout virtually all the country.’ I did not read anything about providing winter protection in the colder growing zones. I found most varieties listed as hardy to zone 5 or 6. When I did find another variety rated zone 4, the next website listed the same cultivar as warmer.

I have no experience growing Louisiana iris without winter protection. I grew Black Gamecock in a three-gallon container. In the winter, we buried it potted in the garden and covered the area with a thick layer of leaves. New growth would be present when it was removed from winter storage.



Black Gamecock with *Typha latifolia* 'Variegata' (variegated cattail) in the water garden

Divide Louisiana iris in mid-summer after flowering. They grow from aggressive running rhizomes that quickly fill a container. Each rhizome blooms only once but new offsets bloom the next season. When it is time to divide, remove the rhizome mass from the container or dig up the clump from the garden. The rhizomes with the green tips (new offsets) are what you replant shallowly. Bareroot plants purchased in the spring will not flower that year.

Most plants in our water gardens need some special care to survive Minnesota winters. I consider Louisiana iris to be no different. The lovely flowers rewarded my time and extra effort.