

## Dealing with Iris Borers

### **Life Cycle of the Iris Borer**

The most effective control relies on an understanding of the borer's life cycle.

**Fall:** Moth emerges from pupa and lays eggs on the rhizomes.

**Spring:** Eggs hatch into small crawlers that enter new leaves.

**Summer:** Borers enter the rhizomes.

**Late summer:** Borers leave rhizomes and pupate in the soil.

### **What should the gardener do to reduce the chances of Iris Borer infestations?**

**Spring:** *when new foliage is 4-6" tall, watch for the signs of borer infestation.*

*A sharp eye for borer entry allows some gardeners to catch the borer in the leaf before it travels to the rhizome (simply pinch them in the leaves).*

*If the borer has chewed its way further down the leaf, it may be easier to remove a portion of the leaf then search for and destroy the borer.*

*Optional: Apply beneficial nematodes to the soil as soon as the soil warms to 50F or 10C.*

**Early to mid August:** *Dig, clean and replant any borer infested rhizomes.*

**Fall:** *Cut back the iris leaves and remove them from your property if possible. Clean all garden debris, especially iris leaves, from the rhizome area.*

### **What are the signs of iris borers?**

- Wet stains along the leaf edges.
- Streaks and wondering tunnels on leaves that later turn yellow and brown.
- Notched out leaves.
- Small pinholes.
- Fine silk threads left from their spinning.
- 'Sawdust' looking remains at the base of the plant from their waste.

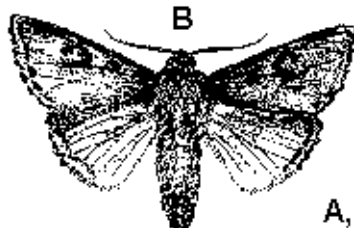
In advanced stages, the central leaf may yellow and will be easily pulled out, sometimes even the whole fan. Severely infested iris may also fail to bloom.

### **What do the borers look like?**

That depends on their stage of development. Most gardeners only see iris borer when they are digging up damaged plants and looking over the rhizomes. At this stage, they are 1-2 inches long (pink-gray in color), with dots on their sides and a brown head.

Pupae are shiny, reddish-brown and segmented, about an inch or so long and narrow.

**Fig.85 Iris Borer**



**A, Female Moth. B, Male Moth. C, Larva.**

**What should I do if I suspect I have borers?**

- In early to mid-August, dig up iris plants showing symptoms.
- Trim the foliage to a 3-4 inch fan.
- Wash the soil off the rhizomes.
- Discard any pieces of the rhizome that are decayed.
- Examine the rhizomes for holes where a borer may have dug in. If you cannot see the borer, but suspect it is still in the rhizome, you can either cut away that section with a sharp knife or soak the rhizome in a water and 10% bleach solution. If the borer is still there, it will back out and drown. This may take a few minutes to an hour or two.
- After soaking the rhizomes, or cutting a section away, let them dry thoroughly.
- Dispose of any decayed or infested rhizomes, and replant.

**Should I treat the rhizomes with anything before I put them back in the soil?**

To avoid any decay on the new breaks or cuts, dust the rhizomes with a powdered fungicide such as sulfur (gypsum) or Bulb Dust.

**When I dug my iris there were several black, mushy rhizomes that were filled with little white worms. Are those borers?**

Those are maggots. They are the good guys and do not hurt your iris. Maggots are like a cleanup crew, going in where nothing else will and making use of the decaying tissue.

**Are there any controls for the iris borers?**

- In the spring, introduce beneficial nematodes to prey on the iris borers.
- In the fall, do not allow any iris leaves, stalks or other garden debris to remain in the area of the rhizome. This is a perfect place for eggs to overwinter.
- Rely strictly on digging and replanting infested iris each August, making sure there is no plant residue on top of the iris over winter.

**Do borers bother all types of iris?**

While all types can be damaged, tall bearded iris are most at risk.