About the Blue Flag Iris

Submitted by Irene Tobis, Vice-President

Native to eastern Canada and northeastern US, the Blue Flag Iris (Iris versicolor), also known as Harlequin Blue Flag, Larger Blue Flag, or Northern Blue Flag, is most often encountered at the water's edge or in seasonally flooded meadows but adapts well to garden settings as long as it is not subjected to extended periods of drought. It prefers full sun to partial shade and blooms May through July.

The epithet versicolor means "variously coloured". The flowers may be any shade of purple or violet-blue, but are always decorated with yellow on the falls. In the Iris family (Iridaceae), its several blooms grow on a sturdy stalk among tall, graceful sword-like leaves that rise from a basal cluster, 2-3 feet tall. The name "flag" is from the middle English flagge, meaning "rush" or "reed."



It has been the provincial flower of Quebec since 1999, having replaced the Madonna Lily which is not native to that province. Photo from along St. Lawrence River by Nichole Ouellette/ouellette001.com (cropped) under Creative Commons license.