

The American Iris Society Announces
Iris of the Year 2026 ‘Royston Rubies’
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Photo by Adam Cordes

The American Iris Society (AIS) is pleased to announce the 2026 “Iris of the Year”, tall bearded iris ‘Royston Rubies’. This outstanding iris is the result of hybridizing work conducted by plant breeder Adam Cordes of Hillman, Michigan. Adam introduced ‘Royston Rubies’ to the public through Mid-American Garden of Salem, Oregon in 2017. At the time of its introduction, Adam had been hybridizing irises for 13 years and ‘Royston Rubies’ was his first introduction.

About ‘Royston Rubies’

The Iris Encyclopedia describes this iris as having late midseason bloom; its standards (top petals) and style arms (center of flower) are old mauve (reddish purple); falls (bottom petals) dark ruby red overlaid black and edged old mauve with white rays at sides of mustard-orange beards.

When asked to describe his iris, originator Adam Cordes said it is an outstanding garden plant because of its ruggedness from being bred in northern Michigan. The cultivar does well in climates across the country, and enjoys a long bloom season with wonderful branching and high bud count. Adam named his iris for the tiny farming community where the Cordes Family established its homestead in 1873 and its ruby-red color. Red coloration is unusual for bearded irises, and ‘Royston Rubies’ is “a nice advancement in the reddish color spectrum of irises.”

AIS Garden Awards

Irises are judged chiefly on their qualities as perennial garden plants, with more emphasis on strong growth characteristics and disease resistance than on mere beauty and distinctiveness of the flowers. Judges accredited by the AIS cast votes that resulted in ‘Royston Rubies’ earning an Honorable Mention in 2019; an Award of Merit in 2021; a Wister Medal in 2023; and AIS’s highest award, the American Dykes Medal in 2025. Along the way, ‘Royston Rubies’ earned the Zurbrigg-Mahan Seedling Cup for the best seedling seen in gardens by attendees of the 2015 AIS National Convention.

About the American Iris Society

The mission of AIS is to organize and disseminate knowledge of the genus *Iris* and to foster iris preservation, enjoyment, and continued development. The Society is welcoming to all people regardless of race, religion, socioeconomic status, ethnic background, gender, or sexual orientation. Members collaborate locally, regionally, and nationally to encourage the cultivation, enjoyment, and preservation of all irises. Activities often include educational programs, judges’ training, exhibitions, and garden observation of irises in 15 horticultural classifications. The AIS maintains the official world registry for non-bulbous irises. Visit the AIS website for more information, including a commercial directory of iris growers and hybridizers: www.irises.org.