**Qs &As**

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Q: My neighbors gave me a bunch of old, dried-out iris bulbs that he says will grow if I just plant them. I am doubtful. Are they as tough as he says?

A: Yes, irises are a great plant for central and south Texas. They have attractive, evergreen foliage and magnificent blooms in February (Cemetery) or March (Dutch or German). Irises are drought-tolerant and deer-proof.

Plant the rhizomes in a sunny location where water does not accumulate. A key planting requirement is to place the rhizomes in the ground so that the top is level with the soil surface. They do not do well in soggy soil or if buried too deep. For the same reason, do not mulch irises. Even rhizomes that have been out of the ground for several years can recover to bloom after one growing season.

Q: I have just retired and want to get heavily into gardening to fill my time. I will garden more at home, but what are the best organizations to join?

A: Every year I produce a Gardening Resolution article that lists lots of ways to use your gardening skills and interests to meet the gardener’s needs and to contribute to the community. Go to [plantanswers.com](http://plantanswers.com) or [wctc.tamu.edu/columns/](http://wctc.tamu.edu/columns/) to check out the suggestions.

Check with your local school and/or gardening club to see what they do. You can also join the closest Master Gardener chapter. Master Gardeners offer great training and volunteer opportunities in youth education, beautification projects and environmental programs. Chapters exist in Bexar County, Comal County, Gonzales County and Guadalupe County. Call the respective county courthouses or Google the chapter for contact and enrollment information. Master gardeners are affiliated with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

Q: What is the story on pyracantha? I always thought of it as an attractive landscape plant that provides nesting sites and berried for the birds. At a gardening program the other day, the speaker said it was an undesirable, exotic invasive plant!

A: I agree with your opinion of pyracantha. It is a well-adapted exotic that does not appear very invasive in our area. It has an honored place in my landscape because of its berries, drought tolerance and versatility. Everyone has to decide on their own.