

Twin City Iris Society

News and Views

Vol. X, No. 5

May, 1962

I saw my first iris bud bursting from its sheath yesterday; closer examination showed many coming through or about to pop out. Bloom-time is certainly not far off. I hope it stays cool enough to keep the big bloom period in line with the show dates — which are, as you know, Sunday and Monday, June 10th - 11th. Too, at Mrs. Bakke's our tiny new seedlings are popping out at a great rate and it looks as if we will be able to transplant next week, remembering Mr. Fay's admonition to transplant when the seedlings are from 1 to 2 inches tall. We are also looking forward eagerly to those of our seedlings coming into bloom this spring. While we don't expect to set the iris world on fire, still it's a thrill to see what comes from the various crosses. I have never seen the irises, on the whole, look as good as they do this spring. They are full of increase, the leaves are large and husky and it should be a banner year !!

The show this year will be back on the old schedule with early Sunday morning set-up and open to the public Sunday afternoon, so make your plans accordingly and bring all those beautiful bloom stalks — maybe this year you will have the Queen of the Show. The show schedules, tags, etc. will be available at the next meeting — if you won't be able to attend and will drop a line to the show chairman:

Mr. Urban Ipsen
6515 Knoll Street
Minneapolis 27, Minn.

he will be glad to send you a schedule.

The next meeting will be May 24, Thursday, at the Y.W.C.A., 8:00 P.M. This will be the last meeting before the show and will be invaluable to you first time exhibitors as well as to all others who will be exhibiting. The program chairman gives you the details:

After the disappointment (and embarrassment!) of the March meeting, it was indeed a pleasure to show all the lovely color slides entered in our contest. The judges had a difficult time deciding which one should win in each class. As a result of much deliberation, a \$2.00 certificate, good at the auction, was awarded to each of the following:

Best individual bloom	Mr. & Mrs. L. R. Smith
Best clump	Same
Best arrangement	Mrs. Fischer
Best garden shot	Ben Haeg
Best group of slides	Frank Williams

We wish to thank all those who entered for helping to make our contest interesting. Mr. Sacco deserves special mention for his splendid color shots. He failed to win a prize because his finest shots were not of irises, but we hope he will make full use of his obvious talent during blooming season.

From program chairman, cont'd

Everyone was disappointed with the quality of the duplicates we had made to start our slide set. They have been returned to Eastman Kodak to be remade.

Carol Lankow did a fine job of conducting an open forum on hybridizing. I am sure she would have appreciated more questions from the floor, but I feel sure that if we do this sort of thing more often we will get more response from the members. If you would like more programs of this type (on arranging, general culture, or what-have-you), please let us know.

At our May 24th meeting our eminently qualified Mr. Sindt will discuss judging for the benefit of exhibitors as well as judges. Through this discussion we should become familiar with the points judges consider in awarding ribbons. He will also advise us as to the best methods of transporting our blooms to the show. There will be live flowers, I hope, on which we will demonstrate the mechanics of pollinization, and we will invite all those who would like to try to make an actual cross. After this lesson we feel no one should fail to have some seed pods come fall.

Remember, this is the last meeting before the show and also the last regular meeting until fall. Be sure to come !

MayBelle Wright

And from our President:

One of the fascinating things about gardening is that it provides so many opportunities for hobbies within a hobby. This month I would like to depart from the past pattern of these monthly letters and write about one of these side interests which has been my own pet project for study — fertilizers. And in so doing, I realize that I am taking my life in my hands, because the division of opinion on this subject gets downright emotional. To the strict organic adherents my views will be construed as sacrilege and treason, so let me hasten to say that I, too, view a compost pile with something akin to mother love, but I don't really feel sinful when I take my plant food chemicals out of a bag.

All of this was brought on the other night when I was browsing through iris catalogs and reading the cultural instructions. Frequently the reader is warned against the use of chemical fertilizers. A typical instruction stated that an excess of nitrogenous fertilizers will cause rapid, soft growth and susceptibility to rhizome rot. How true ! I applaud these growers for their warnings, and I quite agree that in the incautious hands of a beginner a bag of fertilizer can be deadly. But I submit that the key words are "excess" and "nitrogenous."

Fertilizers are rated in terms of three numbers, always printed on the bag, as 5-10-5. They refer to the respective percentages of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potash, in that order. To oversimplify the functions of these elements, the nitrogen encourages leaf growth; phosphorus encourages flowers, fruits and seeds; potash encourages stems and roots. Of the three, nitrogen is the eager beaver. Most of its commercial forms become quickly available. The plant gobbles it up and its leaves grow like crazy. You can give a row of radishes a good dose of nitrogen and produce a perfectly glorious crop of leaves — without a single radish underneath. That result would be ideal on a lawn,

President's Letter, cont'd

but not so good in an ornamental plant. Phosphorus and potash, on the other hand, are not so enthusiastic. They don't insist on being gobbled up; they wait for the plant to need them.

With this background, we can begin to construct a fertilizer formula for irises that will give us the results we want, namely sturdy plants, solid rhizomes, and lots of flowers. Here is my own pet formula. I take one part of any commercial 5-10-5 fertilizer and add one part each of superphosphate and muriate of potash. I dump the resulting mixture into twice its volume of gypsum and thoroughly mix the whole mess. Now my nitrogen is diluted down to slightly over 1/2 of 1%, and I can safely spread this mixture rather liberally around my iris plants (definitely not on the rhizomes) and hoe it into the soil without any fear of "rapid soft growth and susceptibility to rhizome rot." Why not omit the nitrogen entirely? Because I want a moderate amount of leaf stimulation. The leaves manufacture the food that is stored in the form of starch in the rhizomes.

Now what about that gypsum that cropped up in the last paragraph? Here we're getting out of the strict area of plant foods and into the related field of acidity and alkalinity. Gypsum is calcium sulfate. Its reaction in the soil is neutral or slightly acid. All of the other forms of calcium available to gardeners are alkaline in their reaction. Irises like calcium, but in a strongly alkaline medium certain plant foods, notably potash, become insoluble and hence unavailable to the plants. Gypsum supplies the calcium and at the same time makes the vital potash available.

So there, my friends, you have in an abbreviated form my personal (and admittedly unprofessional) views on this fascinating subject of fertilizers. What makes me think they're correct? Well, my irises seem to grow and increase and produce flowers, and I haven't had a case of rhizome rot for at least three years. You say the same is true of your irises, and you always feed 'em straight 10-10-10 lawn fertilizer and you never heard of gypsum? Then maybe you'd like to take issue with me. By all means, do so. That's one of the numerous privileges of being an amateur gardener in a free country!

G. F. Hanson, President

A note on membership:

The Membership Contest is lagging a little. With such a wonderful incentive, we should each try harder.

Alice Bakke is zooming ahead of the rest of us. She has two more new members this month. They are: Mr. and Mrs. Manfred Warmuth, 3656 Gettysburg Ave. No., Minneapolis 27.

... Mary Haertzen

Our librarian, Walter Carlock, has been hard at work and has compiled a list of books available at the Minneapolis Public Library having to do with the Iris. He states, "I have included a lot of the old books because they are of interest to the historian, and can be very interesting to the lay person who wonders what the old iris looked like."

Mr. Carlock also informs us that we are now, as a society, the proud possessors of the two volumes of the Wilson Colour Chart, published by the Royal Horticultural Society of London. Our library has a start!!

IRIS BOOKS AVAILABLE AT THE MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC LIBRARY

- 34.5 American Iris Society, Inc. — Iris, an ideal hardy perennial. 1947.
A51.2
- 634.5 American Iris Society — Irises for the amateur, edited by the secretary, R. S.
A51 Sturtevant. 1924. (American Iris Soc. Bulletin No. 10, Jan. 1924).
- 581.158 Anderson, Edgar — Introgressive hybridization. 1949. 109 p. il. (Biological
A54 Research series).
- 634.5 Cave, N. L. -- The Iris. 1951.
C37
- 634.5 Country Life — Irises for all gardens. 1919. v.36 No. 2, p.25-39.
fC85
- *584.24 Dykes, William Rickatson 1877-1925 — The Genus Iris. With 47 coloured
fD99 drawings by F. A. Round, one coloured plate of seeds by Miss R. M. Carsew
and 30 line drawings by C. W. Johnson. Cambridge (Eng). The University
Press. 1913.
A monumental work, invaluable to the student specialist and kept in the
Rare Book Room.
- 634.5 Dykes, William R. — Handbook of garden irises. 1924.
D99
- 575.1 Goldstein, Philip — Genetics is easy. 1955. (I would not recommend this as
G63 a first purchase, but will help the hybridizer).
- 634.0 Hort, Sir Arthur F. — The unconventional garden. 280 p. 1928. pgs.176-212
H82 on iris.
- 634.5 Lynch, Richard Irwin — The Book of the iris. with a chapter on the cultivation
L98 of the oncocyclus section especially written for this work by Rev. Henry
Embank. 1904. 214 p. plates.
- 634.5 McKee, William J. and Harrison, J. R. — Half century of iris. 1954. 248 p.
M147
- 634.5 McKinney, Ella Porter — Iris in the little garden. 1927. Little garden series.
M15 il. bibliog. p 113-4, (discussion of various species, care, use, list
of iris).
- 634.5 Mitchell, Sydney Bancroft — Iris for every garden. rev.ed. 1960. Drawings
M68 by Tom Craig. 216 p. il.
- 635.0 Phillpotts, Eden — My Garden. 1906. 207 p. (Three entertaining chapters
P56 on iris. Interesting for comments on the bulbous varieties and the more
difficult species).
- 634.5 Randolph, L. F. editor — Garden irises. 1959. 600 p. (authoritive for
A51.3 amateur, specialist, home gardener, iris breeder, by 40 specialists).
- 34.5 Rockwell, F. F. — Irises ... 1928. drawings by George L. Holerock and
R68.2 author. Home garden series.
- 634.5 Shull, James Marion — Rainbow fragments; a garden book of the iris, with il.
S56 in full color; also photographs. 317 p. Doubleday. 1931.

IRIS BOOKS - MPLS. PUBLIC LIBRARY, cont'd.

634.5 Spender, R.E.S. and Pesel, L.F. — Iris culture for amateurs. 1937.
S72 il. plates. Bibliog. p146-148.

634.5 Stager, Walter — Tall bearded iris (fleur-de-lis), a flower of song. 1922.
S73

634.5 Wister, John C. — The iris; a treatise on the history, development and
W81 culture of the iris for the amateur gardener. 1927. 128 p.

634.35 Wood, A. H. — Try these indoors; a handbook of unusual houseplants.
W87.1 1941. p.77-112.

Next meeting — Thursday, May 24, 8:00 P.M. at the Y.W.C.A. — Plan now —
Everyone Come !!

Also mark your calendar now for Twin City Iris Show — June 10 & 11, Twin City
Federal Building, Minneapolis.