

Twin City Iris Society

-News and Views-

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What beautiful weather!! It makes one feel put upon and a little abused when indoor chores keep you inside when anyone would so much rather be outside doing all the spring gardening chores which must be done. The air is fresh and clear and I can hardly wait till the iris bloom. I was very lucky this year & have lost none & there is no sign of rot — I feel doubly lucky when some people have lost quite a few and most, at least one or two. There is only one worry now, if this hot weather keeps up will the iris bloom exceptionally early? It seems this is a question that comes up every year.

Our next meeting will be Thursday, May 16, at the Y. W. C. A., 12th & Nicollet, Mpls., as usual, at 8:00 P.M. This is a must meeting for those of you who have not shown iris before & want to take part in our yearly show — and we hope you all do!! A panel will discuss Iris Judging and Show Preparation and will answer all questions on these topics you care to ply them with. Methods of transportation to avoid injury to the delicate blossoms, grooming tips, how to judge your own iris for the best specimen to show, etc., etc. will be discussed. Come prepared with anything you have wondered about. There will also be a few slides from the Kansas City 1962 National Convention.

Our Iris Show is one of the foremost things on the Society's mind — collectively and individually. Let's have a report on how things are progressing from our very efficient, busy show chairman, Marge LaCroix:

The preparations for the show are buzzing right along in high gear. Plans for the 1963 show are as follows:

When: June 8 - 9, Saturday - 2:00 to 8:00 P.M., Sunday - 12 noon to 6:00 P.M.
Where: American Hardware Mutual Insurance Co., 3033 Excelsior Blvd.,
overlooking beautiful Lake Calhoun.

The schedule is at the printers and will be distributed at the May meeting. Posters have been made and will be placed in the different community shopping centers and nurseries. The publicity committee is really buzzing and is doing a wonderful job. Be sure to watch the newspapers, radio & TV, as we will be having various publicity blurbs in all these media.

Invitational letters are being sent to different garden clubs, etc. to enter the special invitational class in the artistic division. There will be commercial displays by various nurseries, floral displays by florists — also, an informational booth by Ortho, manufacturers of insecticides & pesticides. Mr. Carlock, our librarian, is working up what sounds like a wonderful educational exhibit.

But most important, of course, are our displays of iris in the various specimen classes and the artistic division. The object of an Iris Show is to stimulate enthusiasm for iris and iris growing. Growing iris is fun — so let's show our iris!! It takes many bloom stalks to make a successful show — you & your iris are needed!!

There is a great deal of work involved in putting on a show and the help of every member is needed. On Friday, June 7th from 3:30 to 6:30 we would like a good working crew to help carry chairs. This must be finished by 6:30 P.M. as the auditorium will be in use thereafter. Help will also be needed after 6:30 to set up the show. Hostesses will be needed during the show — if you can serve in this capacity, please contact Mary Haertzen, JA.1-4497.

We are also looking for someone to be in charge of a luncheon for the judges & committee on Saturday. If this suits your fancy, call Marge LaCroix, LI.5-8151.

Good luck to each of you. I hope you all win blue ribbons.

Marge LaCroix, Show Chairman

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Last month in this column I suggested that in our role as iris specialists, we owe it to our pet flower to be discriminating in the varieties we grow, and to toss out the old dogs that fail to measure up to our standards. I'm sure some of our folks who know about my habit of hanging on to certain old favorites decided I was reforming, and probably others began to suspect me of snobbism (which I abhor in any form!) So now I would like to pursue this subject a little further and correct both impressions.

I don't know of any flower that has been improved as much as the iris in the past 25 yrs. or so, and yet some of us are still hanging on to old small flowered, weak stemmed, dog eared, muddy colored relics of a bygone age and showing them to our garden visitors as representative of the glorious world of the iris. BUT, don't let anybody tell you that an iris has to be a new introduction with a \$20 price tag on it to be good. The October, 1962 Bulletin of the American Iris Society listed the winners of the top awards in the 120 accredited shows held across the nation last year. Blue Sapphire, a 1953 introduction, led the parade by being selected six times. Four irises tied for second honors with four wins. They were Violet Harmony (1952), First Violet (1952), Bang (1955), and Star Shine (1949). Blue Rhythm, that deathless old favorite from 1945, was picked three times. Two time winners included, among others, Mary Randall (1951), New Snow (1946) and Blue Shimmer (1942).

Turning to the popularity poll of the 100 favorites selected by the A.I.S. members in all growing areas, we find that Blue Sapphire leads the list again. Happy Birthday (1952) is still in 10th position. Chivalry (1944) still ranks as No. 38. Ola Kala, that veteran from 1943, is still in the top half of the selections at No. 48, and Blue Rhythm (1945), is still No. 55. Further down toward the end of the list we still find Desert Song (1946), Minnie Colquitt (1942), and Wabash (1936).

What does all this mean? Obviously it doesn't mean that Star Shine and Blue Rhythm are necessarily better irises than some of the magnificent new varieties that won top honors only once in the 1962 shows. But just as obviously it does mean that many of these grand old timers are still capable of holding up their heads in distinguished company and consistently producing winning show stalks. My point is simply that we don't have to have an unlimited bank account to show our friends and neighbors good irises. But we do have to look critically at what we are growing and toss out those that fail to measure up. Sparse, temperamental flowering might be acceptable in a century plant, but not in an iris. Weak, sagging stems need a lot of compensating virtues to make them worth staking up, and then please, do the staking. Floppy, dog eared falls and muddy colors are inexcusable under any circumstances. So let's consign our dogs to the compost heap this year. Don't give them to the neighbors; that will only perpetuate their failings. Bury them deep, lest they take root and tempt somebody to rescue them again!

G. F. Hanson, President

DWARF IRISES ... by David Sindt

Undoubtedly many of you were attracted by Carol Lankow's most interesting article on the median irises in a recent newsletter. If you are interested in extending your iris blooming season even more than is possible with medians, consider the dwarfs!

Let me warn you right away that the dwarf irises have changed greatly in the past ten to fifteen years. No longer are we limited to the very early Atroviolacea (purple), Azurea (light blue), and the later blooming dirty whites, yellows, blues, and purples. Modern dwarf irises come in every color and pattern found in the tall-bearded classes, except for flamingo pink and true blends; even these we expect to see in the next two or three years. Besides this variety, the dwarfs boast several colors & combinations of colors

that even the tall's don't have, such as a true green and - believe it or not - a yellow with a violet beard! Imagine the wealth of potential for breeding such irises open up, to say nothing of garden value!

Miniature dwarf irises - by AIS standards - are any irises under 10 inches tall. The Dwarf Iris Society adds early blooming season and lack of branching as further requirements, though there are few iris this short that don't bloom early & any that branch are almost automatically eliminated because of badly crowded flowers.

There are many fine dwarfs in a very moderate price range. According to my student's pocketbook, this means one dollar or less. Many of these varieties are still the only ones of their color or pattern. This becomes an even greater value when the plants multiply much faster than tall-bearded irises; many varieties, including the bulk of the newer ones, multiply so fast that they should be divided every two or three years. And only once have I seen a dwarf listed at over five dollars, even when first introduced.

In selecting varieties, I would like to suggest that you go more by the awards of the Dwarf Iris Society than by those of the AIS, for these reasons: DIS judges are dwarf iris specialists, whereas few AIS judges see or grow enough dwarfs to properly evaluate the field. After all, it is difficult enough to keep up with the tall's! Also, the DIS has a more complete, three-level award system, while the AIS has only two open to dwarfs — the H.M. and the Caparne Award. DIS awards are the Award of Special Merit (ASM) (like the AIS H.M.), the Blue Ribbon Award (BR) (like the AIS Award of Merit), and the Walter Welch Award, formerly known as the DIS Medal (like the AIS Dykes Medal), for the best dwarf iris of the year.

A few of the best moderately priced dwarfs, according to my own personal experience, are: Blue Frost - a luscious light blue; Cherry Spot - the only white with a sharply contrasted red spot in the falls, the color of a bing cherry; Gay Lassie - very fine Pinnacle pattern; Red Gem - excellent red, color compares with red in tall's; Veri Gay - refined variegata, very good; Black Baby - fine red-purple, not black; April Morn - light blue, the only dwarf earlier than Atroviolacea; Dirty Face - one of the greenest greens, not dirty; Ablaze - variegata, much brighter than Veri Gay; Little Joe - good black on the red side; Buster Brown - prolific brown bitone; Little Mohee - larger, slower growing brown, good; Promise - good lavender pink; Path of Gold - clean, bright yellow.

I can't resist adding a few of the more expensive varieties that have really proved themselves to me: Fashion Lady - excellent yellow, my favorite in this color; Black Top - very good black on the blue side; Sparkling Eyes - pure white, deep purple falls, a classic, though somewhat temperamental; Bright White - excellent pure white, very prolific. I think this is my favorite of all dwarfs; Heart's Content - like Sparkling Eyes, falls not as smooth, but a much better grower; Knick Knack - the first plicata, flower much like a miniature Mme. Chereau.

Another suggestion: The Dwarf Iris Society puts out an annual bulletin (seventy pages this year) that has an excellent reputation. The bulletin alone is worth the three dollars annual dues.

If the iris season seems to take forever to arrive each spring, why not shorten your wait by a month to six weeks with a few of the modern dwarfs? You might be pleasantly surprised!

Oh — that yellow with the violet beard? Its name is Blue Whiskers!

Remember the meeting, Thurs., May 16th, 8:00 P.M. at the Y.W.C.A. Let's show our support & interest in the show by coming out for the meeting.

On June 8th I hope each & everyone of you will go over your irises, pick out the best ones & bring them to the show. There is a class for everyone from the juniors, the rankest amateur, up to the commercial grower — and what a thrill to see those ribbons on your entry — and it could happen to you. Come — join in the fun — and let's make this the biggest & best show we've ever had and may you all win blue ribbons!!!