

THE IRIS STANDARD

NEWSLETTER OF THE TORONTO REGION IRIS SOCIETY (TORIS)



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'Unstable Gene' (Kasperek '01) TB - photo by K Brewitt



From My Iris Garden

Given the ravages resulting from last year's borer infestation, Terry and I had anticipated a reduced number of blooms this year...something we've learned to live with...however, in the end, we were both pleasantly surprised. Our first bearded iris bloomed May 2 while our last opened up on June 22. Both our open gardens had sufficient bloom so as not to disappoint our visitors, with many irises blooming for the first time in a year or two. My personal 'highlight' was discovering that 'Unstable Gene' (see picture above right) had not been whisked away by 'garden gnomes' and still grew in my garden!

The National Convention in Kansas City was wonderful. We ate too much, laughed a lot and saw a tremendous number of irises. However, upon return, Terry & I literally fell out of the taxi from the airport and into our garden. We had an Open Garden the next day and the garden had been neglected for a week. We cut the grass, dead headed irises, pulled weeds and set-up an information table all in time for our 10 am opening. It always amazes me what we can accomplish when we have to. However, shortly after dinner, we both collapsed!

The following weekend we had a wonderfully relaxing visit to 'On Russell' for their MDB/SDB open garden, which you can read about on page 2.

This year saw another successful flower show at the TBG. BJ Jackson of the Can-West Iris Society in Winnipeg visited us that weekend to complete some judge's training, which included a wee lesson on borer damage...they don't have the 'little critter' in western Canada...something I envy! However, BJ did comment about having 'TB envy'. TBs can be unpredictable on the prairies due to the short growing season and cold temperatures. So I guess Torontonians take the good with the bad. Our reward?...being able to grow the more stately TBs.

The following weekend Terry & I flew to Winnipeg to judge Can-West's iris show plus finish off BJ's judges' training hours. Unfortunately it was a short

visit, flying in Friday and out Saturday, but during that time we were lucky to spend a relaxing afternoon in David and El Hutchison's Canadian Iris Display Garden. We also held two judges' training sessions, judged over 160 irises and in turn, learned copious amounts about growing irises in zone 2/3 gardens. Then, once again, we flew home, fell out of the taxi and into our garden for our final Open Garden of the season.

I learned a lot this iris season however, as beautiful as the flowers are that come with it, I'm always relieved when things start to wind down and I can relax...and I plan to do just that...at least until August when it'll be time to dig up our rhizomes for the auction/sale at the TBG! **WAIT!** Our Spurias are in bud which means we'll probably have another couple of weeks of bloom...gosh, it's been a "blooming" good season!



Upcoming TORIS Events

TORIS Annual Auction and Sale

Sunday, August 16 – Doors open at 1 pm.

Toronto Botanical Garden, 777 Lawrence Ave. E.
(at Leslie Street), Toronto. Admission is FREE

Members: if you are donating named rhizomes for sale, please arrive by 11:30 am so we can label, price and sort your irises.

An auction of newer iris introductions followed by a sale of older rhizomes (Table Sales) provided by TORIS members from their gardens. This is a great opportunity to buy irises at unheard-of prices. To view a slide show of the irises being auctioned, go to www.webshots.com. Do a search for 'tjlaurin'. Then do a search for 'albums' of 'tjlaurin'. Click on 'change'. Select 'TORIS August Auction'. Also, check www.torontoirissociety.com for details.

Welcome New TORIS Members!

M. Mark & E. Ives – Ottawa, ON

T. Calalillo – Toronto, ON

President's Open Gardens May 18th and June 14th

It would seem 'Mother Nature' liked our decision to change our MDB/SDB Open Garden to the Monday of the long weekend as she 'blessed' us with a warm and sunny day. A light frost the night before left the blooms a bit crêpey however there were still lots of colourful irises to be seen.

This year's display consisted of seventy MDBs, SDBs and one IB, 'Precious Little Pink' (Byers '95), which garnered a lot of attention. Again we asked visitors to select their five favourite cultivars from those in bloom. As always, the results were interesting as choices spread across four decades of introductions; from 1966 to more recent ones from 2006. The top six choices were;

1. 'Absolute Joy' (Aitken '06)
2. 'Cherry Garden' (B. Jones '66)
3. 'Ruby Eruption' (Chapman '97)
4. 'Gingerbread Man' (B. Jones '68)
5. 'Little Show Off' (Hall '89)
6. 'Rainmaker' (Nichols '86)



*'Absolute Joy' (Aitken 2006);
photo courtesy of R. Walker*

For our first TB Open Garden, four weeks later, we were blessed yet again with a warm and sunny day. With almost 100 TBs and Siberians in bloom, our garden was awash with colour...in fact earlier in the week a neighbour, poking his head over the fence, commented on this fact. Contributing to this was the Dykes Memorial Medal collection. Just over half of the 77 irises in this collection were in full bloom with each plant putting out at least two bloom stalks. It was a sight to be seen!

And, proving that 'variety is the spice of life', visitors selected a wide range of irises as their favourites. The following three irises were the only ones to receive more than one vote;

1. 'Queen's Circle' (Kerr '99)
2. 'After the Dawn' (Ernst '94)
3. 'Kilt Lilt' (Gibson '69)



*'Queen's Circle' (Kerr 1999)
photo courtesy of K Brewitt*

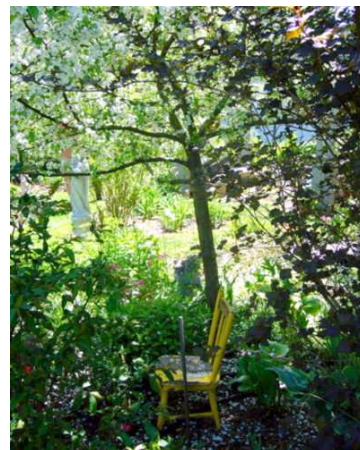
This year visitors who participated in the selection of the top favourite irises had their name entered into a draw for a free 1-year membership to the Toronto Region Iris Society. The winners were S. Osbourne of Unionville and H & R Tengedal of Little Britain. Congratulations and enjoy!



ON RUSSELL Open Garden Event

by Kate Brewitt

A visit to 'On Russell' is always a pleasant experience, and an annual 'tour' to which I look forward. This residential garden in Lindsay continues to expand and grow...no pun intended...with every visit. Each nook and cranny of the garden is filled with surprises from yellow Lady Slippers to rusting tools placed casually on display. In one part of the garden is a little yellow child's chair. Upon seeing it, I was immediately tempted to crawl in behind the quince bush beneath the flowering crab apple tree. Realizing I was too big for both spot and chair, and not wanting the chair to succumb to the same fate as Baby Bear's chair in 'Goldilocks', I was reduced to being happy with a photograph.



What's also notable about 'On Russell' is the extensive collection of newer iris introductions. David makes sure he brings in recent introductions and award winners every year ...which explains the need to continually expand his gardens. Newer irises on display this

On Russell – cont'd

day were 'Eye of the Tiger' (Black '08), Circus Clown (Black '05) and 'Leopard Print' (Johnson '06).

This year David & I spent the first hour 'hybridizing' although our technique may leave some hybridizers shaking their heads. It wasn't anything scientific but rather some good fun. We simply selected irises that displayed traits we liked and crossed them. It was even more fun coming up with possible names for our potential Dykes medal winners. A vivid imagination can go a long way!

The rest of the day was spent relaxing in the shade of an old Manitoba maple and tagging along on tours...all visitors to 'On Russell' receive a personal tour of the garden with either David or Jim; a nice touch!

As always, TORIS would like to thank David and Jim for allowing us to promote irises and the Society in their garden. Remember the website for 'On Russell' is www.onrussell.com. There is a large selection of irises and other plant material available for purchase.



Annual Iris Show Results

As the days ahead of this year's show unfolded we all worried about whether or not we would have bloom stalks. Members in Toronto were fearful that their TB bloom would be over while those of us north of the city worried about whether or not we would have any TBs in bloom. Fortunately between the two groups we ended up with a mixed display of TBs, MTBs, BBs, IBs and Siberians. In the end our members managed to bring out approximately 50 magnificent bloom stalks.

This year's entry in the Novice class was Manuel Poli. She brought out three of her TB beauties however, like all of us at the beginning, she admitted to having a hard time justifying cutting them from the garden. Trust me, Manuela, it gets easier with each show.

Jinny and April Missons brought three of their seedlings from their hybridizing program. It was great to see what these two ladies are working on. One of Jinny's seedlings, a dark purple, caught the eye of more than one visitor to our show. After one woman had purchased the bloom stalk at the end of the day, another yelled, "Do you have that iris for sale? I want to buy that iris!"

Our judges this year were Terry Laurin and me. It was our first show as Garden/Exhibition judges and we enjoyed ourselves immensely.

And now, the award recipients! Congratulations to all our trophy and medal winners!

R.D. Little Trophy for Best Specimen (Queen of the Show) – Kate Brewitt - 'Pink on Yellow' (Niswonger 2002)

Toronto Region Trophy (Princess of the Show) – Lyn Hickey – 'Kleberg Maid' (Nichols 2003)

Jean Sanderson Trophy (Best Canadian Introduction) – Terry Laurin – 'Eramosa Miss' (Chapman 1998)

F.W. Caulfield Trophy (highest points in Tall Bearded classes) – Lyn Hickey

Verna Laurin Historic Iris Award – April Missons – 'Elsa Sass' (Sass 1938)

AIS Silver Medal (highest number of first place ribbons) – Lyn Hickey.

AIS Bronze Medal (next highest number of first place ribbons) – Terry Laurin.

Thanks to everyone who came out.

HYBRIDIZING BASICS

Part II

*by Jan Sacks of Joe Pye Weed's Garden,
www.jpwflowers.com.*

Sowing Seeds:

Most iris seeds need a lengthy cold/moist period followed by a warm period before they will sprout. In a natural setting this is done by winter and spring. Some people try to hurry up the process by planting their seeds in pots, putting them in the refrigerator for two months, and then putting them under lights in the warm house. The easiest way to germinate iris seeds, however, is to let winter and spring do the work. For this method, iris seeds should be planted in October or November in your favourite soil mix; a soilless mix, like Pro-mix, works fine. The seeds need to be covered with soil and watered well. Leave them outside for the winter and they will sprout in May. They will come up looking like little blades of grass. Some seeds are reluctant to sprout and may not come up until the following year so if you can, save your seed trays for at least two years.

Planting

When the seedlings are large enough, about 3 or 4 inches tall, plant them in the ground in a prepared bed. Large weeds should be removed, the soil should be loosened and mild amendments, like compost and alfalfa meal, should be added. Add lime if needed for your class of iris. How close together you plant your seedlings depends on how much space you have available. Some hybridizers plant their seedlings very close together which can create difficulty when it comes time to dig them out. Five to six inches apart seems a minimum for most classes, though some might need as much as twelve inches. If you have the room, use more. The seedlings will start growing soon after planting in the ground. Make sure to keep them labelled, weeded, and watered until they are growing actively. A slow-release fertilizer can be added; mulch, if appropriate. At the end of the first summer, each seedling will probably have a few increases. If a rough winter kills some of the seedlings, it is not the worst thing that can happen. You want your plants to be able to survive all sorts of weather conditions. Some of your seedlings may bloom the next spring, giving you a peek into what they will look like. You will want to keep the seedlings weeded and lightly fertilized over the next growing season. By the end of that summer they will be husky plants ready to flower the next spring.



EVALUATING AND SELECTING SEEDLINGS

Once your seedlings bloom, the next stage of hybridizing is evaluation. This is probably the hardest part, but it is also the most fun. Initially you should put your seedlings in two categories- 'keepers' and 'tossers'. These decisions should be done over time. A seedling may look like a

Dykes Medal winner one day and a dog the next, or great one year and just not good enough the next. Some seedlings will have no worthwhile qualities and these should be tossed. They can be marked to remove later or dug out while in bloom. The rest should be saved. If you are lucky, you may get a few seedlings that are beautiful and look like they might be good enough to introduce. These should be marked with their own individual number as well as the cross number (for example, 01-A-1 or 01-1-1. or ZMSE-1 or any other method you choose). You will need to watch these seedlings for a few years to see if they keep their good qualities. There is a much larger group of keepers that is very important-seedlings that are not good enough or unique enough to introduce, but that have a particular special feature you would like to use for further breeding. This feature may be color, or pattern, or form, or structure, or vigour, or some other growth habit. These seedlings should also be given individual seedling numbers. There may be some seedlings you just aren't sure about. These can be numbered individually or just left for a decision in the future.

In evaluating your best seedlings for possible introduction, you will want to think about what other irises may already be introduced. Ask yourself if it is really distinctive. Could you recognize it every time without a label? It is very easy to be charmed by a good looking iris that you created, but it should be something new to the iris world, not just new to you. Ask the garden judges in your area to come during bloom season and give you their opinions. The AIS Handbook for Judges and Show Officials provides information on garden judging and can give you guidance on the standards for each class. Just remember, not every saver or possible introduction needs to be perfect or score 100 points, but it should be really good. Once selected for possible introduction, you will also need to start propagating or "lining out" your best irises. Even though a seedling looks outstanding in its original clump, it may not propagate well and therefore may not be able to be introduced.

There is some record keeping that will help in the process of evaluation and selection. Start a "studbook" - a list of your crosses and the results from those crosses. This can be simple or detailed depending on your time and interest. You will want to take very careful notes on any iris you may want to introduce, including its bloom period,

height, bud count, color description, form description, etc. You can just make notes or create an evaluation form that reminds you of all the things you want information on. Photography is also very helpful. Take pictures of your numbered seedlings so you can spend time thinking about them when they are not in bloom- and show your "children" to other hybridizers and iris fanciers for feedback.

After several years you may begin to feel some conflicting pressures -for example, SPACE, TIME and ENERGY. How long to keep seedlings for breeding? How long to evaluate seedlings for possible introduction? How to make room for more seedlings? How much time to devote? Hybridizing is usually intoxicating and there is a desire to do more and more. It becomes a balancing act.

REGISTRATION AND INTRODUCTION

These are two different things - often confused. When you decide you have an iris to introduce you must choose a name and register it with the American Iris Society. When that iris is offered for sale commercially for the first time, it is called 'introduction'. These are technical terms that affect many things including the timing for an iris to enter the AIS awards system.

In order to register an iris you have to write to the AIS registrar with a proposed name and a \$10 US registration fee per iris. There are also some rules that you have to follow when naming an iris. One of the most restrictive is that the name can't contain more than three words. Selecting a name is not easy - you want it to be good but it must also be available that is, never been used before.

There are a few ways to check what names are available. One is to look in all the AIS Checklists and R & I (AIS's annually published **Registrations and Introductions**) lists. Another is to use the on-line list of iris names which is almost up to date but not quite (irisregister.com -you need to get a password from the Webmaster to use it, and there is a fee to use it). Finally you can keep sending names to the Registrar until the one you have selected is available, or you can send a list of several possibilities and ask which ones are available. Some people get around the difficulty of naming their plants by adopting a standard prefix like "Harpwell" or "Dirigo" or "Missouri" or "Prairie. As long as no one else uses your prefix, whatever

one or two word names you select to use with it should be available.

When you have reserved a name and paid your fee the registrar will send you a registration form. It requests all kinds of information including the class, and a description of the plant and flower height, bloom season, fragrance -all that stuff you hopefully have in your records. It also asks for the seedling number and the parentage. Once you have sent in this form, the registrar will send back a registration card. Your iris is registered. It will appear in the R & I for the year in which the registration was done, and will be listed as registered by you.

Once the iris is registered, it can be offered for sale at any time you choose, immediately or at some future time. Once it has been offered for sale, you need to inform the registrar by sending him a copy of the catalog, list, or advertisement in which it is offered. (If you advertise in the **AIS Bulletin**, the irises you advertise are automatically considered introduced whether you inform the registrar or not.) Whatever year this is done, your iris will appear in the R & I for that year and will be listed as introduced. If you are the one who first offers it for sale, you are listed as introducing it. However, if someone else or some other nursery offers it for sale for the first time, they are listed as introducing it.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This is hybridizing in a very small nutshell. I'm sure most of the hybridizers reading this will have many variations on the suggestions contained in this article. Most of us are self-taught. And this is only intended to get you started - trial and error is the best approach. Never hesitate to ask for advice - but never forget to follow your own counsel and chase your own dreams.

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