



The Aurora

Can-West Iris Society's Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 2

June 2007

Update From the Organizing Committee

Well, no one can say that iris are boring! After a bumpy spring, I am pleased to report that the Can-West Iris Society is alive and well. Our membership has increased and the dedication of our members has inspired the Organizing Committee to continue to try to be the best we can be, to move forward and get back to the plants that we enjoy..

To that end, the annual rhizome sale will continue and this year will be held the first weekend in August. The format will change a bit but it should make it a bit easier to work run. The sale listing will be spectacular, too. We will have a number of very exciting varieties to choose from and I'm sure there will be something to tempt every one of you. This is the only fund raising event that will be held by our group this year so we look forward to your support.. And, if things work out, we may have some exciting news for you next time. So, stay tuned!

You will see by the masthead above that we have chosen a name for our newsletter. Even with the name change, it still works. And, I am pleased to announce that the "Name That Newsletter" contest winners were Shauna Cannon and Deb Petrie. They will each receive three rhizomes of the Organizing Committee's choice along with their sale purchases this summer. I thank everyone for your submissions. It was not an easy choice since we had at least 8 entries that were in the running. Congratulations to Deb and Shauna.

Response to the first issue was amazing. Thanks to all who wrote with their thoughts and ideas. Keep them coming folks. This is your group and your newsletter. We need to know what you want to see and hear about. You'll be pleased to hear that the "Iris

Friend or Foe" column was a resounding success and is back again this time with a new critter. Thanks, Ed for your great research and identification skills..

The website development continues under the direction of Debby Nelson, ably assisted by Nadine Pickard. As soon as it is up and running, a notice will be posted to the Open Forum list.

So sit back and relax, take a few minutes out to enjoy your newsletter; you've all earned it.

B. J. Jackson, Jennifer Bishop ,
El Hutchison, Deb Petrie



**Although Green Spot is registered
as an IB (P. Cook, 1951),
it has never attained that height for me.
It always grows to SDB size,
about 10 inches in my garden.
B. J. Jackson**

Sneak Preview — 2007 Rhizome Sale

You might be wondering what is new and exciting for this year's rhizome sale. That is a very good question and have I got an answer for you!

Over the years, the Organizing Committee has received donations of rhizomes from the Canadian Iris Society as well as a number of private individuals. A goodly number of these rhizomes have been grown in our gardens, some for three or four years, and they are now a good size and ready to split. What to do with them all??? After careful consideration, we decided that this would be the year that we made them available to our members. They range from oldies but goodies to relatively new introductions (2000 or newer). All have bloomed true to name and many have been posted to the Open Forum list so you have seen them and know how wonderful they are.

There is a wide assortment of sizes and colors as well as classifications. We have MDBs, SDBs, IBs, MTBs and a TB or two.

So, mark your calendar for the first weekend in August when the sale will be posted to the Open Forum list on Yahoo!. I don't want to let the cat out of the bag, but you will be amazed and astounded at the variety available to you. Some are in very limited numbers while others have multiplied almost exponentially and speed in ordering will be essential. Divisions will be generous and the prices very reasonable so set aside some of your iris budget for the annual rhizome sale!

Now might be a good time to set up your PayPal account because as you all know, first come is first served.

We look forward to your participation.

Did you know ...

... Certain types of gin use iris root and flowers for flavor and color?

...The iris has been linked with France since Louis XII adopted it as a symbol in the 12th Century?

MDB Survival in Manitoba

By: Eleanor Hutchison

**Reprinted from the Dwarf Iris Society newsletter of
November 2006 with permission**

Last winter, my project was to update my entire iris database with as much additional information as I could find, from both online and catalogue sources. Irises that I couldn't find any information for aren't included here. A few missing irises (due to label problems in 2001) are also not included. I've had all of these irises for at least three years, but the majority have been in my garden for more than five years. I have included 2005 and 2006 acquisitions in a separate column, just for your interest. While sorting through all classes, I also discovered that in some cases, while a particular hybridizer's miniature dwarfs survived, that wasn't necessarily the case for that hybridizer's tall bearded iris.

All new irises are planted in one of my three raised nursery beds, filled with ordinary top soil. I buy a few hundred irises each year, so I can keep a better eye on them all when they're together. The only mulch is snow. They may receive some quarter strength liquid alfalfa or sheep manure tea in spring after active growth starts, if time allows. I give all plants three chances, and then it's off my list, although it sometimes takes years to replace a specific iris, however. Survival is high if they make it through our late spring frosts. A few of my favorite hybridizers aren't on this list simply because their irises are new to my garden this year or else I have none of their MDBs.

After blooming, the irises are moved out of the nursery beds and into the landscape; those beds are raised by 6". Most MDBs get carefully divided into two pieces so I can experiment with their location. I'm very lucky that I have lots of southern exposure, but in areas that get more shade than sun, these little guys do very well. An added bonus is that I get longer bloom times. A tabulation of the surviving cultivars from the previous three seasons in my garden appears on the next page.

**See page 4 for some thumbnail size photos from
the list and page 5 for a few larger ones**

HYBRIDIZER	SURVIVED HERE :3 OR MORE YEARS	NEW 2005	NEW 2006
Aitken	Grapelet Sparky, Pink Blink		Be Little, Sun Dabs
Bausch	Bashful Bunny		
Bierman	Mary B		
Black	Cinnamon Apples, Spot Of Tea, Garden Gnome		Dinky Circus, Wiggle, Branded, Hat's Off
Boswell	Puppet Baby, Little Pearl		
Boushav	Strawberry Cream Babv Pink, Petite Blush		
Briscoe	Brass Button		
Brizendine	Funny Face		
Brown	Navy Doll, Bee Wings, Dark Note, April Flirt	Mini Plic	
Burton	Suslik		
Chapman	Tickle Me, Coral Carpet, Forever Violet, Humbug		
Dunbar			
Dunbar-Sindt	Lemon Puff, Velvet Toy		
Fry	Brown Imp		
Gaddie	Almond Joy		
Goos & Koeneman	Cvanea		
Grapes	Green Eyes		
Greenlee	Knick Knack		
Hager	Bugsy, Ditto, Libation, Bitsy, Flea Circus, Grey Pearls, Invisible Ink, Gizmo, Coy, Doodle, Kid Stuff, Three Cherries, Tiny Cherub		Self Evident
Hamblen	Garnet Elf		
Hite	Black Stallion, Harry Hite	Nancy Butterfly	
Hubbard	Cupcake		
Jones	Tooth Fairy		
Kasperek	African Wine		Gruz Spread, Yak Attack
Lankow	Hey There		Jolly Joey
Love	Mark		
Machulak	Maya Mint		
Mahood	Grandma's Hat	Red At Last	
Miller	Golden Eyelet, Bitsy Blue (often blooms first here), Child Bride, Twist Of Lemon, Candy Fluff, Snuggles		Hobbit
Palmer	Extra		
Peyrard	Passion Bleue, Voie Lactee		
Roberts	French Wine	Flirty Eyes (bloomed 06)	
Schreiner	Sleepy Time		
Sindt	Zipper, Egret Snow, Quip		
Sparling	Olney Belle		
Spence	Blue Wind		
Todaro	Atroviolacea		
Varner	Bantam		
Williams	Kissimee, Moondrops		
Wilott	Alpine Lake, Gold Canary, Snowy River, Betwixt, Glenwillow, Royal Bee, Pixie Pirate, Western Circles, Tiffany Glass, Elfin Magic, Little Drummer Boy (bloomed first 2006), Pixie Kisses, Pussy toes, Toyland	Daisy Fresh (bloomed 06), Midas Mite, Pixie Flirt Sunny Song	Millennium Bug, Crown Of Snow



Be Little



Branded



Maya Mint



Self Evident



Hey There



Brown Imp

Dividing Bearded Iris

By: Deb Petrie

The time has come to divide your bearded iris. You stand and look at the overgrown clump and scratch your head. Where to start? When to start? How much to dig? All these questions and more went through my mind as I stood contemplating my first iris divisions. I did a little research (very little) and talked to some iris buddies (a lot) and got to work. Through trial and error, by the time I finished those first year's divisions I had worked out a system that has served me well.

You will need:

1. A garden fork or spade
2. A knife you will only use for gardening from this point on
3. A garden hose
4. A bucket
5. A powdered fungicide - I use Comet (yes, the kitchen cleaner)
6. A Sharpie Industrial marker
7. Garden tags and sturdy elastic bands
8. Bleach or other sterilizing agent

The last thing you will need is more space in your gardens to put the divisions or some gardening friends to share them with. The latter are usually fairly easy to find.

About the when part, you should wait until 4 - 6 weeks after the iris has bloomed before dividing. At this point the iris is entering a period of semi-dormancy when little if any root or top growth is taking place. In our zone, this is usually mid-July to early August depending on classification. They can be divided in spring, but you will sacrifice the year's bloom if you do it then.

To begin, dig up the over grown clump taking as much of the root as possible. In my heavy clay soil I find a spade is better for this but if you have a lighter soil then a fork may work better for you. It is important to get it all when you dig because if you don't, it can seriously affect your garden diagram. This can be a problem when you have two or more clumps that have grown together. What I have done is to mark the leaves of each plant with a Sharpie Industrial marker while the plant is in bloom. This helps with identification of each part of the clump when the time comes.

Once you have dug up the clump, clean and inspect it. I use the garden hose to get off the soil lumps and then place the whole thing in a bucket to wash off any remaining soil. Then inspect it for rot. If rot is present the rhizome will feel soft and mushy and it will smell nasty. Cut off the rotten area and dust the cut area with a fungicide. Clean all tools to prevent the spread of rot from these divisions to others you still need to do.

Now that it is clean, you can usually tease the rhizomes apart with your fingers. If this can't be done then you will need to decide where to cut the rhizome to separate it. Look closely at the rhizome and you will see areas of natural division where you will do the least amount of damage. Any cut you make will leave an open area that may allow the fungus associated with fungal rot to enter. Allowing the rhizome to dry and dusting it with a fungicide will help prevent this.

Next, trim the leaves and roots which make the much easier to work with.. Write the variety name on the leaves immediately before moving on to the next variety. The division(s) you are returning to your garden should be planted as soon as possible but rhizomes can stay out of the ground for a week or two with little damage. Those that have been out of the ground for more than a few days should be soaked well to re-hydrate them prior to replanting.

Iris, Most Beautiful Flower

*Iris, most beautiful flower,
Symbol of life, love, and light;
Found by the brook, and the meadow,
Or lofty, on arable height.
You come in such glorious colors,
In hues, the rainbow surpass;
The chart of color portrays you,
In petal, or veins, of your class.
You bloom with the first in Winter,
With the last, in the Fall, you still show;
You steal the full beauty of Springtime,
With your fragrance and sharp color glow.
Your form and beauty of flower,
An artist's desire of full worth;
So Iris, we love you and crown you,
MOST BEAUTIFUL FLOWER ON EARTH!*

Edith Buckner Edwards
AIS bulletin January 1961



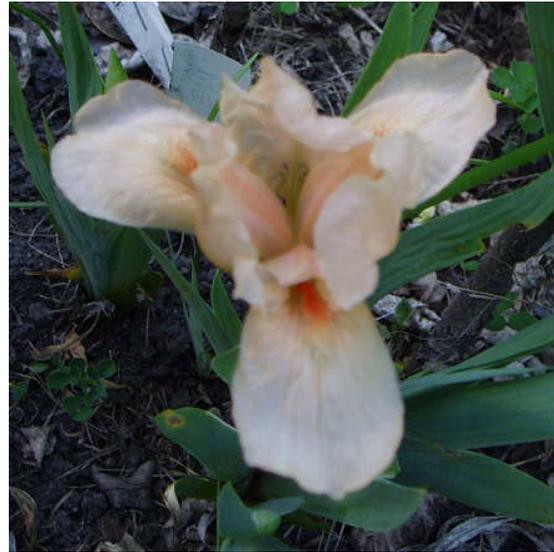
MDB Betwixt (Willott, 1986)



MDB French Wine (Roberts, 1966)



MDB Sleepy Time (Schreiner's, 1987)



MDB Tickle Me (Chapman, 1998)

Did you know...

... Debby Rairdon, a TB iris hybridized by an amateur hybridizer in her backyard, won the Dykes Medal in 1971? Mrs. Lois Kuntz, housewife, mother and grandmother created it and against all odds, it won the AIS's highest award. Other Dykes winners hybridized by non-professionals include Skywatch (1970) that was created by a retired aircraft engineer, and Babbling Brook (1972) that was hybridized by a postal supervisor and iris hobbyist.

... Iris pseudacorus was a source of colored dyes? Many publications refer to the leaves and roots being processed to produce black, greyish, green and even yellowish colored dyes for use in clothing for the Harris Tweed industry.

Seed Starting 101 - Part 2

By: B. J. Jackson

(continued from March newsletter)

When I left off last time, my iris seeds had been in the fridge for almost 12 weeks. During that 12 week period, I checked them periodically for mould and had to throw out only 6 seeds of all the 28 bundles.

On February 18th I brought them all out of the fridge to see if any had sprouted. The entire bundle of seed from El Torito had sprouted so they were potted up right away. I used styrofoam coffee cups filled with ProMix #1 but any well drained indoor mix will do. Because of the styrofoam, the cups need to be watched very carefully so they don't dry out completely. They need to be kept evenly moist (not wet) and a good idea is to use no damp until the wee babies have put a good down root system and have good sized leaves. The seedlings are most vulnerable during this period and need to be watched carefully.

There were no others already sprouted so I next got out a large Tupperware bowl and set the panty hose bundles in the bottom with the knee high tops over the bowl's rim. I then filled the bottom two inches of the bowl with water. I needed a large bowl because of the number of bundles involved (27). If you have just a couple bundles, a much smaller bowl will do.

Changing the water daily, the iris were rinsed in cool water twice a day for 3 days and then checked for germination. Any sprouted seeds were potted up with the pod parent name marked on the side of the cup as well as the date of germination. Following the 3 day soak/rinse cycle, the ungerminated seeds continued to get 1 daily soak but in addition, a warm water treatment. I put the bowl of bundles in a larger bowl of warm water for an hour or two, just till it cooled down to room temperature and then removed it from the other bowl. I read from many hybridizers that this warm water treatment

can help speed up the germination of reluctant seeds. And, over the period of the next 4 weeks or so, a total of about 100 more seedlings were potted up. Then I ran out of styrofoam cups! The remainder were potted into seedling flats.

By the middle of April I had a total of 123 seedlings growing under lights. And there were still a lot of ungerminated seeds. I felt no reluctance whatsoever to tossing them in the garbage. I'd about had enough of iris seeds by then.

Early in May the seedlings were put out in the front porch to harden off. The temperature most of the time stayed around 15 degrees but a few warmer days brought the temperature over 20 degrees and a few cooler nights of about 5 degrees (the porch is not heated). All part of getting used to what they will experience when they are planted out in the ground.

So, now it is June and I am casting about for places to plant all these lovely seedlings. Some have what actually look like the start of rhizomes while others have just a light colored nubbin.

They are ready to go outside. Where will I find places to plant over 120 iris seedlings? A few went as door prizes to a local garden group at which I gave a talk on growing iris, but I still have lots to plant. A friend of mine has planter boxes in her garden so that is what I am going to do. I am going to have a nursery bed planter box made for me and the iris seedlings will be planted in it. That is the plan at this moment, now I just have to get it built!

I am sure that many will be lost over the intervening few years. But, I will do my best to keep them healthy and well taken care of until that day they finally bloom.

So, that's my story of the success and failures of seed starting irises this past 10 months. It has taken a lot of time and a lot of patience but it has paid off in seedlings galore. I am particularly excited to have 4 surviving seedlings from TB Humoresque and 6 from MDB Maya Mint. All

the others are special, too, but these two are my first venture outside of the SDBs. The most seedlings from a single iris award was won hands down by SDB Caraboo. I have at least 25 seedlings from it. Who knows what they all may look like but I keep telling myself there just might be another Debby Rairdon in there somewhere (see Did You Know... on page 5 to find out who Debby Rairdon is/was) and why this is important)

I have already made some planned crosses of SDBs this season and I am hoping seed pods develop. But, I will NOT be keeping all of the bee pods this year. Just the ones from more interesting iris that have traits or color patterns that I like. I just do not have enough room for another planter box in the yard and that is what ultimately will determine how many seeds I plant. Space and nothing but!

And, an aside. In the first part of this article I wrote about the 7 surviving seedlings that were planted out last year. I was hoping to see them bloom this spring but no such luck. All 7 survived their first winter outdoors but none is close to blooming. Still at a single fan, but they have all bulked up considerably. The gardener's mantra "maybe next year" holds true. I will have fingers, toes and eyes crossed for bloom next year!

I hope this has inspired someone out there to try seed starting and iris hybridization. I vividly recall an e-mail conversation with Bill Shear some years ago (he literally wrote the book on iris) where he said the only way modern TB iris were going to come into existence that would survive in very cold climates would be if people who lived there hybridized them. That has stuck in my brain and is the reason I keep trying. It won't happen unless we do it ourselves.

Post Script: Just as this newsletter was going "to press" I noticed that two of my planned crosses had taken! Pods are forming on SDBs Harrigan and Party Animal. Seems really early since they just finished blooming but it will be truly exciting to see if seeds do form and if they do, will they be viable??? The fun continues!!!



Iris Friend or Foe

By: Ed Czarnecki

The critter shown munching on the Iris standard is commonly known as a "blister beetle." According to literature, they are usually found feeding on the flowers and foliage of various plants in the families Amaranthaceae, Compositae, Leguminosae and Solanaceae (latter example tomatoes, potatoes, etc). Note that our beetle is a non-conformist and seems to prefer the Iridaceae! These beetles are in the Meloidae family and there are approximately 2500 species world wide.

They are known as blister beetles because one group secrete cantharadins, a poisonous chemical substance that can cause the skin to blister. One species (*Lytta vesicatoria*) is a common south European beetle from which cantharides are extracted and commercially prepared and are used medicinally as a skin irritant (in plasters) and as a diuretic. The common name for this beetle is the Spanish Fly.

The beetles tend to move in swarms and can cause a great deal of defoliation but may not stay in one area for long. If treatment is required malathion and carbaryl (Sevin) are recommended for control.