For Iris Lovers in the Cold Zones

Aurora

Newsletter of the Can-West Iris Society

Spring, 2021 **Volume 15, Issue 1**

Update From the Organizing Committee

Spring 2021 is trying very hard to get here across the prairies with varying success, but reports from members in BC and ON indicate that it has already arrived. CWIS member Andrea Karpinski shared with us her clumps of SDB Tahoma and MDB Sleepy Time below.



And while we wait, the Organizing Committee has been busy. Because of Covid restrictions, there will be no public events, most notably, no formal iris show again this year. That is the bad news. The good news is that there will be a summer rhizome sale! We had been hoping to announce the supplier in this issue but have not been able to confirm the details as yet. Negotiations are still in progress as to how much we are able to get and when given the current circumstances. We are exploring all options available to us in Canada only this year given our desire to support 'local' growers. But, one way or another, there will be a summer sale. Member donations will be a big part of it so if you find you have extra named varieties regardless of class, please contact jacksonb@mts.net with what you have and we will make arrangements with you to ensure they arrive safe and sound. More information will be shared as it becomes available.

The Virtual Iris Show last season was a smashing success, however, the workload for our volunteers was quite steep. So this year, we have decided to hold a photo contest on our Facebook page. The details are still being worked out and a special bulletin will be sent to all members when we have it all worked out. We are thinking individual class sections as well as clumps but details have not been finalized. So whenever your iris start blooming, take some photos and wait for submission details. For those members not on Facebook, arrangements will be made to have the photos posted for you. And, of course, some great prizes will be awarded for the winning entries. So stay tuned and get those camera shutters clicking!

And the CWIS website has received its first major overhaul since switching hosts in 2019. Have a look at http://www.can-westis.com/index.html

In this issue you will see an article beginning on page 3 from Terry Laurin, President of the Ontario Iris Society and CWIS friend regarding something to watch for in the iris patch in spring. Next up is the annual member profile, this time from Donna Reble in Saskatchewan on page 5. If you remember from the past few years, she has had some amazing rebloom. And since we have a lot of newer members, the article Planting and Propagating 101, compiled for cold zone iris gardening by BJ Jackson on page 9.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter. As always, you can contact any of the OC by writing:

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Eleanor Hutchison/ eleanore@mymts.net
Jennifer Bishop/ Jennifer@dataways.com
Deborah Petrie/ martyaddict@gmail.com

→→→ ***IB Star In The Night***





←←← ***IB Line Drive***

Stay Safe!

Winter Damage in the Iris Garden

By Terry Laurin (tlaurin@rogers.com)

Spring is upon us! Now is the time to check your irises for winter damage.

1. Look for soft rot by pressing on the rhizome. If the rhizome is firm to the touch, it is okay. If there is any give, the rhizome probably has soft rot. Cut out the soft tissue to where it is firm. Do this on a sunny day to allow the cuts to callous over. You can also sprinkle gypsum on the cut or a granular powder cleanser such as Comet® or Ajax®.

2. If you any notice mould growing on the rhizome it is also a sign you have soft rot. The rhizome in the picture below shows mould at the end on the right however the left end of the rhizome shows new growth. Remove the mouldy end leaving the end with the new healthy growth.



Mould showing at right end of rhizome.



Same rhizome, mould end removed.

3. Look for rhizomes that have lifted out of the ground. These should be re-planted by either pushing the rhizome back in the ground or covering the exposed roots with soil.



Same clump cleaned up and replanted.

4. Remove damaged foliage and clean up garden debris, such as leaves, that may have accumulated around the irises.

5. Weed gardens weekly. Cool weather weeds can grow, flower, and set seed within a week. The general rule of thumb is, if any weed goes to seed, you can expect to have weeds for seven years.

6. Fertilize irises once they start to grow. Use a low balanced all-purpose fertilizer such as 10-10-10. If you have reblooming irises, fertilize again right after the initial bloom to encourage rebloom in the fall.

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Member Profile

My name is Donna Reble and I live in Northwest Saskatchewan. I love flowers and the outdoors which has led me to growing irises, daylilies, hardy roses, shrubs and various perennials. My husband has made the comment that you can see flowers from every window of our house.

My gardening journey began 44 years ago the year I married with a vegetable garden and has continued over the years. In 1996 we built a new house and the following year had it landscaped with potentillas, spireas, barberrys, hydrangeas, roses, ninebarks, clematis, columbine, globe spruce, hosta, mugo pines, bleeding heart and daylilies.

A perennial bed was made in the front of our house which is home to several

delphiniums, iris, lilies, tulips, columbine, daylilies, clematis, liatris, salvia, gaillarda, lupines, phlox, bellflowers, dianthus and some annuals. Whatever is hardy gets to stay. This bed is always a work in progress adding new and taking out the old.

Another bed has been made underneath a weeping birch which requires watering practically every day. Here there are growing various hostas, irises, bergenia, bleeding hearts, muscari and fritillaria meleagris. I divided and planted the reblooming Iris "Autumn Jester" in this bed last year to see if it will rebloom in the shade.

I discovered daylilies in 2015 and have 30 award winners planted on the east side of our garage and in the main garden. When the irises are done blooming, the daylilies start blooming so that way you have continuous bloom.

On the south side of our garage I plant annuals and this is where the standard dwarf bearded irises are planted so they receive lots of sun. They generally start blooming mid-May and the tall bearded irises finish blooming mid-July with perhaps fall rebloom in some of the classes. If you have irises from the six different classes, it extends your bloom time. I like to walk out into the garden and see a big splash of color so you will see 90 irises in every color. I started two rows in the main garden and the plan was to keep it to two but now that has turned into three. There are so many new pretty faces to tempt you! To me irises are the best kept secret and wonder why more people have not discovered them. I purchased my first Iris in 2013 from a local nursery, the tall bearded iris "Swingtown" and still have it to this day.

Of course, not all irises rebloom and, as of yet, I have not had a tall bearded iris rebloom. But, I have had success with some of the other classes. I am not sure if our growing season is long enough in the northwest for the tall bearded to rebloom.

The irises in the main garden and by the garage are all planted facing south to take advantage of the sunlight. They are planted like a duck on water with the rhizomes exposed and are fertilized with alfalfa pellets in early spring and immediately after blooming. As well, they receive additional water in dry spells.

During the winter months, I am busy planning my garden for next year. I have placed my order for irises, dahlias, gladiolus, seeds for my cutting garden and vegetable garden and now all I can do is wait patiently for spring.

Some of Donna's Favourites

(Photos by Donna Reble)



IB Many Mahalos



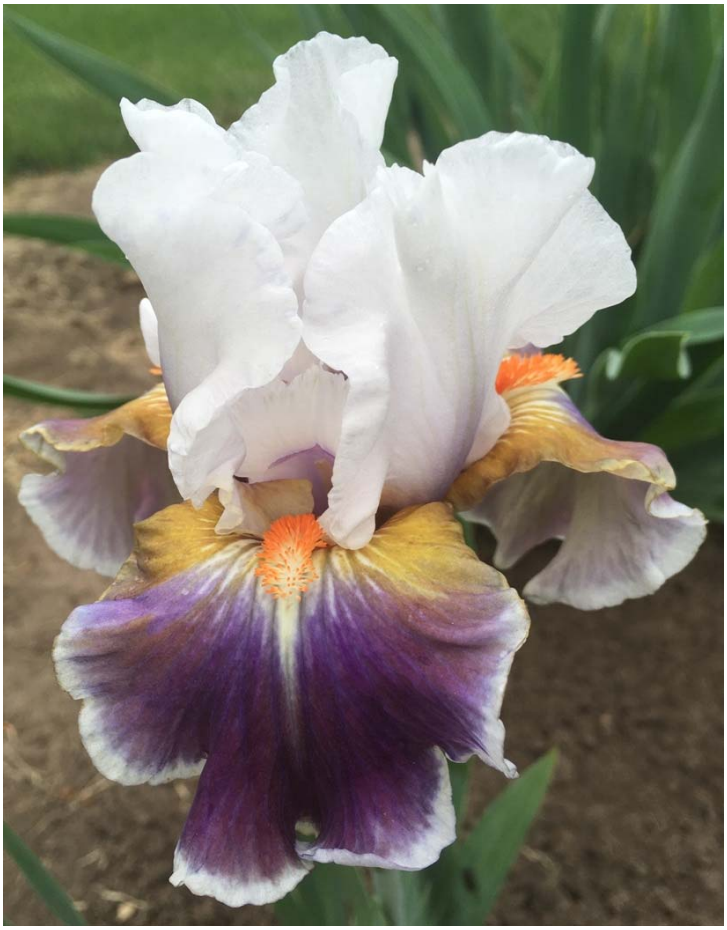
TB Jesse's Song




Left: SDB Blend of Blue/Right: SDB Bluebeard's Ghost




Left: IB Body Painting/Right: IB Eramosa Stone Washed




Left: IB Dazzling/Right: TB Swingtown




Left: BB Crow's Feet/Right: IB Rimaround

Planting and Propagating 101

(Compiled by BJ Jackson)

Iris grow from an enlarged underground stem called a rhizome. These rhizomes grow just at or below the soil surface. They provide the leaves and flowers (called fans), and also the roots that anchor the plant. The rhizome is the plant part that is vegetatively propagated to give new plants of the same type. All that is required is a few inches of firm, healthy rhizome and at least one fan of leaves. Bearded iris will multiply and may require dividing every two to five years depending on the classification. Generally, the median types (SDB, IB, BB, MTB) and the dwarf type (MDB) multiply more quickly than tall bearded types. Peak bloom usually occurs 2 or 3 years after the original planting. Counterintuitively, that is when to dig, divide and replant.

Iris are dormant during the hottest part of the summer (mid-July to mid-August). Actually, it is not a true dormancy but rather new growth slows to such an extent that plants appear to be dormant. This is, therefore, the best time to plant rhizomes to allow for adequate root growth and establishment before winter. During late summer the buds for next year's bloom are formed. It is important to plant the iris early enough to avoid cold damage to these buds. For best survival rates on the prairies, tall bearded types should be planted before the end of July or early August. Medians and dwarf types generally can safely be planted until mid-August and historics perhaps even a little later.

Before planting, work the area to a depth of at least 6-8 inches. If possible, prepare the soil a week or so ahead to allow settling. A well prepared soil bed will result in better growth and more blooms. When preparing to plant, dig a shallow hole large enough to accommodate the rhizome. Leave a cone or ridge of soil in the center. Place the rhizome on top of this cone and spread the roots out around the cone (See Figure 1). The rhizome should be just at or just below the soil surface level. Fill the hole with soil and firm around the roots and rhizome. Water thoroughly immediately after planting but afterward, water sparingly until new growth begins. The start of new top growth will indicate good root establishment.

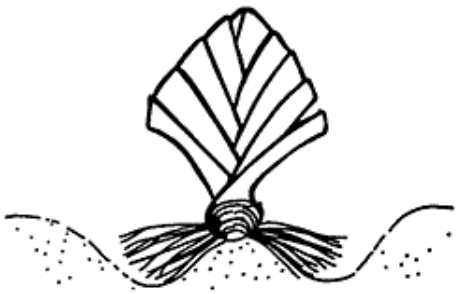


Figure 1. Plant iris on top of cone and spread roots around cone.

Ideally, rhizomes should be planted about 18 inches apart with fans facing the same direction (See Figure 2). For a larger display of an individual color, plant three or more rhizomes of a single variety in a group. Plant these rhizomes closer together with the cut rhizome end pointed to the center. It is an ideal I seldom achieve

To keep iris looking their best and producing good, large blooms, divide and replant every two to five years depending on type and variety. As previously indicated, the best looking year is the year to divide and replant. While they are being divided, be sure that all rhizomes are carefully labeled.

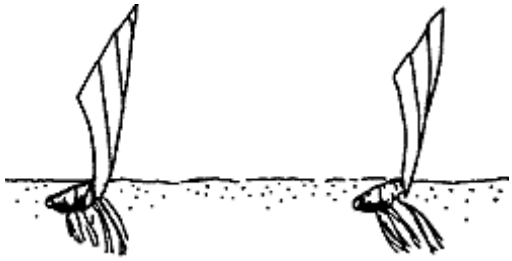


Figure 2. Plant rhizomes at least 18 inches apart, "facing" the same way.

Divide any time after blooming is completed, but for best results divide 4 - 6 weeks after blooming stops. Before dividing, cut the leaves to about one third of their full height. It may be necessary to wash away some soil to see just how the rhizomes look. The most vigorous rhizomes will be those on the outer sides. Carefully cut the clump apart, saving the vigorous rhizomes and discarding the inner, leafless mother rhizomes. These have already bloomed in the past and will never bloom again. Cut the rhizomes into pieces with each one containing at least one or two terminal leaf fans (See Figure 3). Dust the cut ends with a fungicide or alternately an abrasive household cleaner (ie. Comet, Ajax, etc.)

Smaller divisions will not need dividing again for three to five years, but will also be slower to produce a good showing of flowers. Larger divisions will produce flowers more rapidly, but will require division in two to three years. When separated from the clump, each division is ready to plant.



Figure 3. Iris division for replanting.