For Iris Lovers in the Cold Zones

Aurora

Newsletter of the Can-West Iris Society

Spring, 2023 **Volume 17, Issue 1**

Update From the Organizing Committee

Spring is really taking its time coming to Manitoba so far but we know it will get here eventually and our irises will again put on a good show for us. And speaking of shows, after a three year pandemic hiatus, we are back! See page 2 for the details. I can't tell you how excited we are to be able to return to a semblance of normalcy this year. The show schedule has been tweaked a wee bit so it isn't such a hectic rush. We hope to have a more relaxed day to reconnect with iris friends we haven't seen since 2019. I hope you will drop by and see us if you are able. The wearing of masks is optional. We want to provide a safe opportunity to gather together once again.

And since it has been awhile, on page 3 is a piece on selecting stems to show. We encourage anyone to enter the show and this will provide you with some tips and a bit of confidence to do so. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out and someone will be able to help!

Next is a request for help from the Historic Iris Society's Nancy McDonald hoping to track down a missing iris that so far has only been photographed in Canada. Check out page 4 and see if you can help. Next is the Member Profile from Dolly Picard from Saskatchewan. Read all about her iris and gardens starting on page 5.

I hope you enjoy this issue. As usual if you have any comments or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact any of the Organizing Committee listed below. We are here to help!

BJ Jackson - jacksonb@mts.net
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13th Iris Flower Show - Can-West Iris Society

Sunday, June 11th 2023

Bourkevale Community Centre

100 Ferry Road, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Admission is free and we are open to the public from 1:30 to 4 p.m.
Show Chair: B.J. Jackson, jacksonb@mts.net

Exhibitor information is available in the full show schedule you will have received in a separate file along with this newsletter or it can be downloaded from the website at: http://www.can-westis.com/ Just click on "Go There" under 2023 Show!

Since it has been awhile, to review selecting stems, following this (page 3) is an article that will tell you how to do it and what to look for.

We are looking for volunteers, too, so if you have an hour or two to spare please let us know. We cannot do it without your support. The major assistance requirement is with morning set up and organization of tables as well as end of day take down and cleanup as well as everything in between. Just let us know when you are available and we will find a job for you!

The rhizome sale table can always use your donations, too, so please have a look when the snow is gone and see if you have anything extra you no longer need or want.



Scene from a previous show

Tips on Selecting Stems to Show

(by BJ Jackson)

So, how do you decide what looks good enough to take to a show?

Start looking at your garden several days before the show to see which stalks appear to have potential. Mark those with a piece of colored yarn. If you can, wait until the morning of the show to cut so the stem is fresh. If bad weather threatens, you may want to cut the stalks and bring them inside. That said, some prefer to cut the night before, especially if you have to travel a distance to get to the venue.

Ideally, the flowers should have NO faults. Since this is pretty much impossible, be on the look out for bent or bruised petals, tears or holes, extra petals. These all detract from the flower's beauty so be careful when transporting them to the venue. Having multiple flowers open is a plus, but not a requirement. You are better off having a stalk with one nice flower than several flowers that are past being fresh or have other faults. You want blooms that will look good at the time the judges view them, not just when you see them hours before the show. If you have a leaning stalk that you think has potential, try staking it a couple days before the show. If the iris has multiple branches, they should all be in the same plane. The stalk selected should be free or nearly free of leaf spot. Some trimming to eliminate this is allowed, but if extensive and obvious, it will be penalized by the judges.

If at all possible, choose a stalk that has the terminal (top) bud open. Two things to watch for is 'toeing in' (pointed in towards the stalk), and 'towing out', (pointed out away from the stalk). Both of these are faults and will be noticed by the judges. You can help the flowers that are 'towing in' by wedging a piece of cotton, Styrofoam or cork between the branch and the stalk. This may be enough to keep it in that position by show time and won't damage the stalk. Just don't forget to take out your wedge when you get to the show!

Cut the stem at ground level. It may hurt the first time but think of that first place ribbon! And, don’t worry, it does get easier as time goes by. Finally, label the irises at home as you cut them so there won't be any memory lapses at the show. **Do not write on the stalk**. And whatever you do, do not hold the stalk with your fingers. This causes finger marks from the oil in your skin and they are very visible to the judges who will take off points If you see finger marks, brush them off with a paper towel, cotton swab or soft cotton cloth. This is the most often seen and overlooked flaw seen by judges in previous shows.

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Historic Iris Preservation Society

In Search of…

Editor's note: I have been asked to include this request from HIPS in order that our members might be able to help out. If you have or know where this iris which appears to be missing in the US might be found, please contact me and I will pass it on. Thanks for your help!

Hi, Canadian Iris Friends,

Is it spring yet? Not here yet in northern Michigan, but it's inching closer.

I'm writing to ask if any of you grow or know anyone who grows little MDB 'Kissimee' (F. A. Williams, 1972). I collect Frank A. Williams irises, as he was one of the few historic Michigan iris breeders. Tonja Haynes, another Guardian Gardener who collects his irises, lives in his hometown and is doing a lot of research on him, which is lovely, but so far we have found only six of his irises. So far we have Bright Dawn, Joette, Little Bay Denoc, Moondrops, Queen's Baby, and Red Damask.

In looking at the Wiki page for Kissimee, I see that all photos were taken in Canada or at least by Canadians. Hence my query. Thanks for any clues you can give me.

Wishing you all a happy spring!
Thanks!
Nancy McDonald
Historic Iris Preservation Society



Photo from the Iris Wiki

Member Profile by Dolly Picard







My name is Dolores (Dolly) and this is my garden.

I have worked as a Civil Draftsman for 35 years and am starting to prepare for my retirement. Before I give up my day job entirely, I have decided to "invest" in flowers that make me happy. The majority of my collection are irises that can survive my neglect and abuse, and our Saskatchewan climate.

My garden is located in-between Regina and Weyburn, off of a secondary highway. It is 15 minutes "as the crow flies" from where the television series "Corner Gas" was filmed. It is wide open Prairie as far as you can see and on some of the most highly assessed farmland in the country. There are no trees unless they were planted by hand and not a rock to be found below the surface. The heavy clay gumbo has a high plasticity range and will hold water like a sponge and swell against basement walls to the point of cracking if they aren't backfilled with granular material. I love living in a small hamlet on the open prairie after growing up in the hustle and bustle of Toronto.

I presently have over 300 varieties of historic bearded and at last count about 200 varieties of non-historics. The surviving numbers of the non-historics are a probably a much lower number than that, especially the TB's. I've had better

success with the smaller median modern irises rather than TB's unless they were hybridized by a couple of select hybridizers.

I also have over 80 varieties of open pollinated Siberian irises that I've grown from seed the last few years. They are just becoming established and should be in full clumps by the time I retire.

Because my gardens are around my home, I want colour from Spring to Fall without having to rely on annuals. I was advised to take black and white photos of my garden at different stages over the season and see if it looked interesting throughout the year. One thing I noticed was that each hybridizer was much like an artist and had a distinct style. This is the main reason I have my garden organized by hybridizer. Because my iris collection is fairly large, this is a subtle way of organizing them that gives my collection some structure. I've also incorporated different textures of leaves to achieve the effect I want. This was another observation from the black and white photos. My garden is interplanted with a collection of lilies, martagons, daylilies, hostas, peonies & climbing roses, with a few other hardy perennials for interest.

I have incorporated a place to sit and rest in each of my gardens because I enjoy sitting right in the garden, rather than looking at it from the patio or sidewalk. There are distinct pathways within the garden as well, either stonework or log slices so I can walk through it without damaging anything. It also prevents visitors from trampling over young seedlings. Though I have a couple of moose that come back every year who think diddly squat about the stepping stones.



The original garden… recently converted for the second time to adapt with the changes that time has inflicted on it.

This garden was my original vegetable garden 35 years ago. The trees surrounding it matured to the point of providing too much shade and roots that made tilling a challenge (back when I did till). This area lays lower than the rest of the yard and has years worth of leaf litter, used rabbit straw bedding, compost and other amendments I had used in it. I had converted it to perennial and annuals, but it was a nonstop battle with the trees. I converted it again a couple of years ago with Siberian irises, martagons and hostas. The idea is to have the martagon and Siberian iris blooms crowning above the tops of the lower growing martagons, I have had the best results growing Siberian irises from seed rather than individual cuttings, mainly because of shipping times to my location and the roots drying out. There is an article in the Winter 2015 Aurora newsletter where I describe in detail the method I use for germination.

In an effort to keep on top of weeds and not stepping on the young plants, I used log slices from a neighbours tree blended with cedar mulch that I am quite pleased with so far. It's a nice shaded spot in the hot afternoon sun to sit in. (photo taken of the back portion in early spring)



My new Main Iris Garden

When the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool decided to take down the elevators in our hamlet, the grain agent's house and property next door to us came up for sale by sealed bids. We won the bid with a mere $650 bid submitted on a lark, because the Wheat Pool turned off the power while it was up for sale and we are on a force main sewer system, (We're definitely not in Toronto anymore). The basement backed up with sewage so the higher bids refused the property on inspection after winning. We sold the house for removal leaving us with an 8 foot earthen basement to fill in on a 50 x 150' lot. It took a few semi loads of sand….but I have REALLY good drainage in this garden now. Another foot of good topsoil was put on top and it was a whole new ball game for my iris collection.

This is the home to my most prized historic collection. The center of the garden is home to a collection of Ferdinand Cayeux irises that I have collected through the Historic Iris Preservation Society as well as its Guardian Garden program, trading

with other collectors here in Canada and some directly imported from the Cayeux gardens in France. There are about 60 of his varieties in this area.



On the North and South sides of the circle are other historic collections, arranged by hybridizer as well where possible. There is a patch of Gibson's, an area of Canadian born hybridizers…most very rare, a patch of Sass Brother's creations, a few that I planted for their names, and a few that I planted that had a reputation for being very hardy and prolific. The trouble with rare irises is that sometimes there is a reason that they are rare, so experience has taught me to plant very hardy ones that will clump up in between so that I'm not left with a scraggly clump or empty spot because someone had a rough winter.

On the West side of the circle (which is next to a sidewalk that was left from the old house that was removed) is the shorter more modern medians, mostly collected through CWIS sales and from private CWIS members who divided and sold their tried and true proven stock. Along the back of the garden on the East side is a backdrop of daylilies and a collection of really big beautiful peonies (another investment). Lilies are interplanted in this garden as well for continuous colour between iris season and daylily season.



I also have a couple of smaller gardens, the one along side the house faces east and has been a flower garden since the house was built around 1905-1910. It is protected from the wind and is known to get good snow cover .It's biggest challenge isn't nature, it's being trampled on by accessing utilities at the side of the house. This garden holds my Chuck Chapman and Barry Blyth collection. Their "painting" styles are very similar and both hybridizers have produced very hardy irises for my garden. The backdrop is taller, more common perennials.

The majority (I would guess about 90%) of all the flowers in my yard were acquired through garden societies or directly from the hybridizer.

Some of the toughest and most beautiful irises I've had the pleasure of growing have been NOID's (no identification) or KIWI's (known issues with identification). I have these planted in pockets where nothing else will grow and they reveled in the challenge.

I keep an inventory of my personal garden and notes on line at [Dolly's Flower Garden - Dolly's Garden Home Page (weebly.com)]





Judge each day not by the harvest you reap,
but by the seeds you plant.
- William A. Ward

Gray Community Pocket Gardens - Update

(By Dolly Picard)

The Spring 2019 Aurora newsletter featured an article about undertaking a project to beautify our little hamlet with low maintenance pocket gardens. It goes into great detail and photos of what we planted, the people involved and the history of the unknown rhizomes that we planted. Unfortunately I didn't take photos this past summer of the garden in front of the school that the original article featured, but rest assured, we had an excellent survival rate and the clumps are doing quite well. One of our local volunteers planted black hollyhocks along the outside wall behind the irises and we have also had a few local donations from local gardeners of other types of NOIDS named after the gardener who donated them for posterity, such as Nelda's spurias and daylilies.

The hamlet gardens also had a boost from All American Selection in 2020. I had entered details of our community iris garden into a contest by AAS, and believe it or not, our little community won. The prize was the previous five years worth of their winning seeds, many varieties were not available to the public yet. As long as we keep up the gardens, put their markers on the new varieties we are growing and submit pictures of their winning varieties, (and let them link the photos to our website), we will be supplied the newest varieties as they become available annually and indefinitely. We are one of only two such gardens in Saskatchewan, the other is the U of S campus.

The AAS seed introductions are planted with our irises for extended colour and texture. These annuals also allowed us to plant an extremely large above ground planter that the irises would not survive the winters in. Every small town on the prairies traditionally has some type of large feature or focal point. Ours has an ornamental water well as an ode to those that settled here in our Pioneer Park. This year's selections included a border of blue and yellow annuals from AAS as well as a variety of giant sunflowers. It was quite spectacular when it was in full bloom late summer.

I keep an update on the gardens on our community website at: https://www.hamletofgray.com/voluntary-revitalization.html

