



Aurora

Newsletter of the Can-West Iris Society

Spring, 2022

Volume 16, Issue 1

Update From the Organizing Committee

Spring is coming! At least that is what we are told. This time on most of the prairies it is rain instead of snow. Members in BC already have blooms but I think it will be awhile yet for those of us in cooler climes. But at least it is coming.

The Organizing Committee have not been idle with many discussions and decisions having already been made for 2022. The first is that there will be no show again this year. With Covid still very much around, we opted for a cautious return in the absence of clear information. So, 2022 will be a year of getting back to relearning how to interact with people in a safe manner. In 2023, we hope to have better news but for now, that is the way it is.

We have secured Trails End Iris Gardens as our supplier for this year's summer sale in our bid to support Canadian sources. Bob and Ann Granatier have promised a premier list of irises to be made available to our members. There will be a bit of everything from the bearded classes, some of which could be making their way to your garden. Stay tuned for the next newsletter for all the details. In addition, the website has been updated for the year.

In this issue, we have a short piece on freeze/thaw cycles (page 2), followed by a request from the Historic Iris Preservation Society on their Purple Based Foliage (OPBF) survey (page 3). From the American Iris Society we have news about the extension of their membership drive and information about the CWIS 2022 Photo Contest (page 4). And finally, after many years of being asked, BJ Jackson writes about her journey with irises (page 6).

So sit back, relax and enjoy the read. As always, please be in touch with article ideas or what else you might want to read about. You can reach out to any OC member at:

BJ Jackson - jacksonb@mts.net

Jennifer Bishop - jennifer@dataways.com

El Hutchison - elhutch203@gmail.com

Deborah Petrie - martyaddict@gmail.com

Did you know???

Spring Iris Garden Rounds

Did you know that cold temperatures are often not the primary reason an iris may not survive in the cold zone garden???

A lot of times the cold is blamed but in fact, it is the freeze/thaw cycles that do much more damage. During these cycles which are very common in the temperate climate, the already frozen ground thaws briefly and then freezes up again causing the rhizomes to be literally pushed up and perhaps out of the ground completely.

Of course, they can't survive this type of exposure so what to do? Once the snow is gone and you can get at them in the garden without losing your shoes in the mud, take a good look around the iris patch. If any appear pushed up or just not quite right to the eye, investigate further.

Should you find any that look suspect, press them back into the soil to the level with which you are comfortable. This varies with the individual iris gardener. You can also just step gently on them and/or place a suitably sized rock on the rhizome until the tug test meets resistance.

If the rhizome is on top of the ground and shows no signs of rot or desiccation, remove any dead foliage and replant the rhizome, then keep an eye on it until you see signs of new growth that will tell you it has rooted again. Check every few days in the spring and do not remove any mulch too early.



Historic Iris Preservation Society (HIPS) PBF Survey

HIPS PBF Survey Needs Our Help!



Does your iris have Purple Base Foliage? No? Yes? We need to know either way! The 2022 bloom season is or will soon be underway and the HIPS PBF Survey needs your help. The survey collects data from reporting gardeners about whether or not their irises display purple-based foliage (PBF). Observation season is during spring bloom. Both HIPS members and non-members are encouraged to participate.

Please visit the Purple Coloration Types (PCT) Project webpage to see how the information is used, why it is important, and why it is interesting. (Do you have 'Lucky Doris'? ... Visit the PCT page to see why we asked.)

<https://historicism.org/programs/pbf-research/>

Full survey instructions and downloadable forms are available on the webpage. The Survey Coordinator, Shaub Dunkley, is available for any questions and comment at pbfsurvey@historicism.org.



2022 American Iris Society (AIS) Membership Drive

The American Iris Society (AIS) has extended its membership drive. From now until the end of June, AIS invites all eligible persons to participate. The 2022 AIS membership drive consists of a free standard 1 year print membership for every first time member of an AIS affiliate such as Can-West Iris Society or any other AIS section (Median Iris Society, Dwarf Irises Society, Historic Irises Preservation Society, etc.) as well as a first time member of the AIS.

This offer is valid only until June 2022 and cannot be combined with any other incentive offer from AIS Affiliates or AIS Sections. It does not apply to prior members of the AIS nor to prior AIS affiliate members and AIS section members. The AIS Membership Secretary will check for prior AIS memberships.

Have any questions? Contact BJ Jackson directly at jacksonb@mts.net.

- - - -

2022 CWIS VIRTUAL IRIS PHOTO CONTEST!

Given the success of the 2021 Virtual Iris Photo Contest on the CWIS Facebook page, once again in 2022 CWIS will be sponsoring a photo contest! As in 2021, entering the contest is easy! All you need to do is take pictures of the irises in your garden as they bloom, then post your photos to the appropriate album on the CWIS Facebook photo albums page. A notice will be posted to the group page when the albums are up and ready for submissions. Entries must include the name of the iris in each class entered. If you are not on Facebook, please send your entries to BJ Jackson (jacksonb@mts.net) and she will post them for you. Maximum of three entries per person per class.

The classes are:

- A. Miniature Dwarf Bearded Individual Bloom
- B. Standard Dwarf Bearded Individual Bloom
- C. Miniature Tall Bearded Individual Bloom
- D. Intermediate Bearded Individual Bloom
- E. Border Bearded Individual Bloom
- F. Tall Bearded Individual Bloom
- G. Siberian Individual Bloom
- H. Species and Species-X Individual Bloom
- I. Multiple blooms, bearded or non-bearded, identified
- J. Clump shot, bearded or non-bearded, identified

DEADLINE for entries: Entries will be accepted until Friday, July 8, 2022. Photos can be submitted any time but comments will be turned off until the voting period.

Now the best part...PRIZES! The top choice in each category will receive a prize of the Organizing Committee's choice. Winners will be notified plus listed in the Summer 2022 edition of the Aurora newsletter.

We hope you will take this opportunity to participate and enter your photos. Open to anyone who wants to enter, CWIS member or not. Simply find an iris, take your best shot, and post the photos to the correct album on the Facebook page or send to BJ Jackson who will do it for you.

After the entry deadline, everyone will be able to vote on their favourite in each class simply by placing a heart emoji in the comment section. That is all that you need to do.

Any questions? Just send off an email to jacksonb@mts.net and have some iris season fun!



*MTB Tic Tac Toe (Johnson, 2010)
- an example of a multiple bloom entry*

Member Profile

Barbara-Jean (BJ) Jackson, Brandon, Manitoba

My Journey From Tall To Small

I started out with iris the same way a lot of people do with a beautiful purple and white tall bearded shared with me by my brother after my partner and I bought our first home in the 1980s. I still have it, I have no idea what its name might be, and each spring I delight in its grape kool-aid smell.

In those days (pre email and internet), there were few options to buy iris, particularly in Canada. There were no commercial specialty growers, at least none of which I was aware, and the only choices were from the big glossy seed and plant catalogues that arrived in spring and fall from British Columbia and Ontario. I would buy a few tall bearded types every year, dutifully plant them as instructed and pray. They were always received in September or October and they most always died. A few might struggle and last a few years but none lived up to the catalogue claims. I became disillusioned with iris and switched my focus to daylilies, hosta and other perennials. I still bought what I could find but the result was the same, the irises mostly died.

Then came the advent of the internet and with it the joys of email in the mid 90s. Oh my. There were communities of plant lovers and irisarians from across the world. It was a heady time! We exchanged information on everything iris, and excuse me, what was this; there were other types of irises aside from the tall bearded ones? Through these online forums, I discovered a few very interested gardeners in Canada who introduced me to firstly, a Canadian specialty grower who had recently started selling iris commercially (Chuck Chapman Iris), as well as the joy of the smaller types. Several of my new internet ‘friends’ shared what they had with me as well as giving me the benefit of their experience growing iris in the cold zones although even then, a lot of them were from warmer areas. I discovered I was not alone! I discovered people I didn’t know except over the computer would send me irises without asking anything in return! It was a whole new world.

Through these new connections, I learned that in general most tall bearded iris did not do well in cold zones primarily because they were received too late for us. September and October was not going to cut it. If we had a long autumn, maybe, but generally there was not enough time for them to settle into their new homes. It was suggested and still holds true after all these years that to be successful with tall bearded types, they must be in the ground around the last week in July or first

weeks in August to successfully become established before winter comes. The smaller types I also learned were a bit more forgiving of planting time.

And so it began, my growing interest in and collecting of the smaller types including the MDBs and SDBs. In the beginning there were not many of these smaller ones to choose from, the MDBs did not ship particularly well and information about growing them in cold zones was sparse. But through this new network of iris friends that kept expanding as email lists proliferated and more and more information about irises became available, I learned, and as I learned, my collections of all the bearded types grew. Work vacations were planned around the bloom times of the small ones so I could spend more time with them. I was addicted. Gradually I met other iris growers locally, regionally and nationally, joined the Canadian Iris Society in 1997 until it disbanded a few years ago, the American Iris Society in 1998 and various other sections. I was able to visit other irisarians' gardens. The Northern Lights Iris Society was established in 2004 and in 2008 split and the Can-West Iris Society as we know it came into existence in 2008. I received my accredited iris judge status in 2009. Of course that meant traveling a lot including to AIS national conventions (Victoria BC 2011, Portland OR 2015, Des Moines IA 2017). I had been scheduled to attend the convention in 2020 in New York, but then the world blew up.

There were a few problems along the way, most notably that pesky international border, shipping delays, recalcitrant customs agents, federal inspectors requirements, etc. and many irises did not survive for one reason or another. But overall, I am very pleased with the smaller ones and how they extend the iris bloom season. The Standard Dwarfs predominated in my gardens for about 10 years or so and they still make up the bulk of my collections, but I have since expanded to the other bearded classes, particularly the MTBs and IBs. The Intermediates were once thought of as non-fertile and not many were commercially available but as in a lot of plant genera over the years, hybridizers have made great strides with fertility and now there are many more to choose from. The one form that continues to be less available are the Border Bearded and I think I have just one of them. Species and Siberians have also entered the gardens in recent years, too. Several species, most grown from seed obtained from various seed exchanges, do well here and have earned their places. The Siberians, however, do not do as well for me because I refuse to coddle them with extra water which is what they need to perform their best. With a few exceptions, I am thinking the space these occupy could be put to much better use!

I consider myself a plant collector, with the irises and daylilies in rows in one garden and throughout the mixed perennial beds in another. Yes, I have two garden spaces and twice as much fun but twice as many weeds as well! The first garden is open and receives full sun all day every day till late afternoon. The

second garden is a mature series of mixed garden beds most of which receive good sun mostly in the morning hours and dappled shade the rest of the day. The mixed garden is full of daylilies (although I am attempting to cut back of them as time goes on), hosta, martagons lilies, hosta, heuchera and assorted other perennials. One of my prized possessions in that garden is a fern leaf peony that originally came from my mom's garden.

Inevitably, the first iris to bloom for me is the dwarf pumila species Suslik (John Burton, 1995).



In 2021 it showed its face on May 11th. The last iris to bloom for the season was a species versicolor on June 20. It was supposed to be Mysterious Monique but isn't although it is a very nice variation.

Sadly, I have only had rebloom twice in more than 25 years, both were standard dwarfs. The were both by Canadian hybridizer Chuck Chapman who specializes in cold hardy irises in Guelph ON. Autumn Jester was one and Blueberry Tart the other. Forever Blue, another of Chapman's SDB introductions, has never rebloomed for me no matter what I try. I truly do have rebloom envy most years.

When asked how many irises I grow, I can truthfully say that I do not have a clue how many there are really out there. What I do know (I record date of bloom and variety for both gardens) is that 227 different irises bloomed in my gardens in the 2021 season. I consider that a win in a year of drought when many didn't even try. To say 2021 was not the best of seasons would not be an understatement. But there is always next year, right!

In recent years, I have caught the backyard hybridizing bug What I have learned since my first seedling bloomed is that they are not all beautiful. In fact, most are quite nasty looking. I have just three still alive that I have kept since the first seedling bloomed in 2007. Sadly the nicest of the bunch did well for many years but then it was poof, gone. I believe it may still exist in another CWIS member's garden but I am not 100% certain. I must check it out this season.

MDBs seem to be reluctant parents or require ideal conditions to set seed, something we hardly ever experience but I have two that will stay for no other reason than they were the first. There is also an MTB seedling that I am still not sure of and it has been around since 2015. Some years it looks wonderful and other years, not so much. The latest seedlings were lined out 2021 and will bloom in 2023 or 2024 for the first time. Most of the seedlings I have grown over the years, however, have been relegated to the garbage to make room for more to take their place. I just like to see what comes out of them and the variety is truly amazing to see when they finally bloom. In 2020 I began the process of retiring several beds in the mixed garden and have discovered just how hard it is to get rid of plants that have been in the garden for 15 or 20 years. One of those beds is eventually going to be exclusively for seedlings that merit further evaluation. So far just first year blooming seedlings are there and more will be added in the coming years.

As for favourites, I always say that it is the one blooming in front of me that particular day, but here are a few that my garden would not be without.

MDB Sleepy Time (Schreiner, 1987)



SDB Dark Vader (Lynda Miller, 1985)



IB Spring Bonnet (Gordon Plough, 1975)



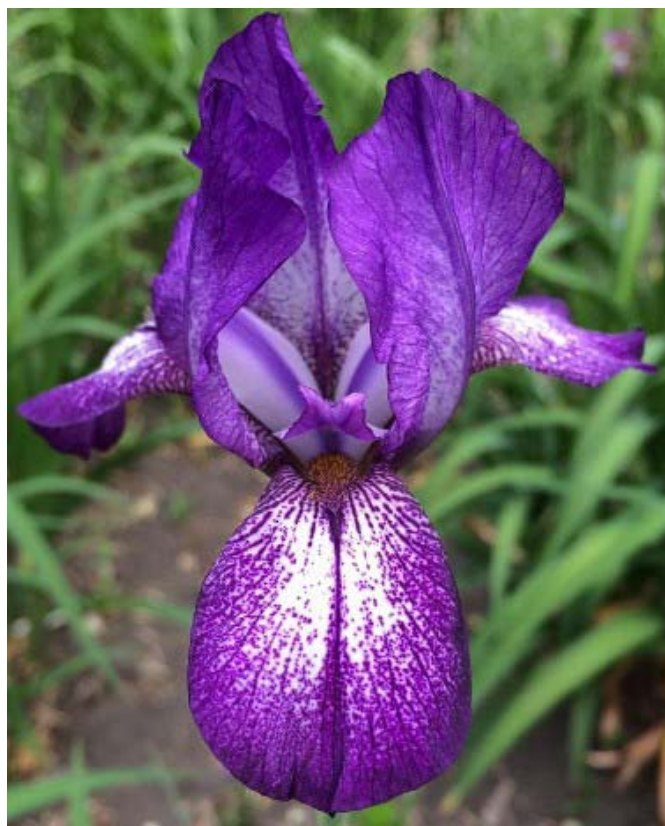
TB Jean Cayeux (Ferdinand Cayeux, 1931)



AB Desert Snow (Paul Black, 2013)



MTB Ace (Lynda Miller, 1999)



MTB Kaleidoscope (A. B. Katkamier, 1926)



There are many, many others but I would be here forever and you would be reading forever so I will stop now except to say that the iris journey continues...



A section of medians blooming in BJs garden