

Edith Cohen 4-2-1975 Fall

THE SIBERIAN IRIS



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Fall 1975

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Membership in this Society is open to members of the American Iris Society living in Canada and the United States, and to interested iris enthusiasts elsewhere. Dues are: Annual Single \$2; Annual Family, \$2.50; Triennial Single, \$5.00; Triennial Family, \$6.

THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE ~

The AIS Convention in San Diego was a fine convention although it was more of a bud convention than many of those attending had expected it to be. Bud conventions are something we must anticipate from time to time until we get absolute control of weather and climate (or get a Buckminster Fuller geodesic bubble.) However, meeting and talking with the old and new friends who share our exciting interests is the most important reason for our conventions, hence every such meeting has a built-in guarantee for success.

This factor was a good thing for the Siberian Section of AIS because the guest Siberians on display did not even reach the bud stage in a bud convention. In fact many of them were having a hard time even staying alive. This was doubly disappointing after the Roanoke Convention of 1974 which presented the Siberians as one of the top exhibits of the entire show. I don't want the reader to get the idea that the host gardeners were careless with the plants we sent to them because this just was not the case. Our Siberian guests at the convention were placed in the most favorable spots for their display; peat moss and other kinds of humus were worked into the soil around their roots; and host gardeners with whom I talked were conscious of the Siberians' need for acid soil and moisture- but no California gardener that I talked to- host or otherwise- actually knew the pH (acidity-alkalinity) characteristics of his soil or water. To the degree that I was able to assess the complete failure of Siberians at this otherwise fine convention, it seems to have been the WATER that did us in. Host gardeners prepared Siberian beds to be sufficiently acid and then, unwittingly, watered them into alkalinity because they knew that 'Siberians need moist soil'; of course they do need moist soil but it has to remain in an acid condition.

I learned a lot about what tall bearded, Spurias, California natives and Siberians both need and tolerate, as a direct result of attending the San Diego Convention. I also perceived a definite responsibility of the Society for Siberian Irises- that is, to inform all of the members of AIS who live in the alkaline sections of the world what must be done if they really want to enjoy the beauty of Siberian irises.

From my own point of view the San Diego Convention did what any good convention must attempt to do. The good convention should send its members home with a new line of thinking about the subject of the convention: San Diego certainly did this.

The annual visit of the Society to Frank and Bee Warburton's home for the meeting, lunch and Siberian-Japanese iris auction was made on August 24th. These meetings are always so good that it would be worth while if our members from other parts of the world could manage to attend. As happens every year, good friends got together to compare notes on iris culture, hybridizing, and description of the year's new seedling beauties.

The Warburtons have our very special thanks for the warm hospitality they extend to us each year. Frank's ability to have that marvelous corn just ripe for our lunches each year is an agricultural achievement that the AIS Convention host gardeners should emulate!

A special note of appreciation from the Society is also owed to Kevin Vaughn for his valuable contributions to the development and continuing success of the Siberian auctions which go so far to provide financial support for the activities of the Society. Kevin has discovered that being an active college student precludes his continuing as secretary of the society. We regret his retirement but look forward to the renewal of his services when his college experience has been completed.

Appreciation for services still to be rendered are also in order. We are more than fortunate to obtain as his replacement, as our new secretary, the services of Mrs. James H. Shepherd. Ethel is highly regarded by the group that knows her best, the Region One irisarians, and I am sure that as the rest of us get to know her better her group of admiring friends will expand very rapidly.

Of considerable interest to the Society is the new AIS book on irises (to which we all look forward.) Our Director Bee Warburton is Editor and Currier McGwen, our Past President, is responsible for the chapter on Siberians, so we can be sure that this book will have special value to members of the Society for Siberian Irises.



William G. McGarvey

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE SOCIETY FOR SIBERIAN IRISES

Following the annual meeting of the Society for Siberian Irises, the Board of Directors met. Those present were: President McGarvey, Vice President Wadkamper, and Directors Bee Warburton, Steve Varner and Ira Wood.

Mildred Johnson and Jayne K. Ritchie were chosen to be members of the Nominating Committee.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.

Ira E. Wood

NOTE EXTRACTED FROM THE INTERNATIONAL ROBIN-

"I tried an experiment with some seeds by planting some very green Siberian seeds. By 'green' seeds I've always imagined that what is meant is a pod of seeds freshly harvested which are greeny-fawn and still shiny and fat. Some of the seed I planted was really green, much more immature than the ones mentioned above. These green and very green seeds germinated in three weeks; seemed to give much better germination than seed left to ripen perfectly and shrivel up." -Jean Collins, New Zealand.

A VISIT TO THE MCGARVEYS

CURRIER MCLEWEN

Our Siberian iris season of 1975 has been the best that I can recall and one of its highlights was a delightful day and a half spent visiting Esther and Bill McGarvey at their home in Oswego, New York, on June 20 and 21. This was an experience Kay and I had looked forward to for a number of years, but always something intervened to make it impossible. Indeed, at the last minute, Kay was unable to go this time, so instead of making a holiday of it by car, I flew out from Maine alone.

I have long known how attractive that whole section of New York on the south shore of Lake Ontario is, but I had not realized before that in the past Oswego was a very important port city. Of course, my visit was too short for more than a quick drive through the city but I enjoyed especially a visit to a small park and garden planted largely with McGarvey Siberians on the banks of the river where it becomes the port, and to the fine campus of the State University of New York at Oswego where Bill has recently retired from his responsibilities as Head of the Department of Psychology. The McGarveys live outside the city in a wooded area quite apart from other people in a charming house some 150 years old. A side of Bill which was new to me was illustrated by the barn. The old one burned two years ago and has now been replaced by a new one built by Bill himself, which shows that he is not only a distinguished professor and hybridizer but also a mean carpenter.

As Bill has emphasized in several articles, his work in hybridizing has been strongly influenced by his interest in genetics. He has said that his wish to develop better flowers has been secondary to his genetic observations. Be that as it may, the flowers he has introduced are, as everyone knows, a standard of excellence. On this visit I saw, of course, fine plantings of Bill's earlier blue cultivars, namely Nellie B., a rather dark blue named for his mother, Blue Burn, Ego, Super Ego and Dewful. The soft blue flowers of Blue Burn probably have been seen at AIS conventions more than any other Siberian because at 'bud conventions' its earliness has produced blooms before others were ready. Of course, Bill's famous trio of Morgan winners-Dewful, Super Ego and Ego- are too well known to require comment. I was especially glad of the chance to see two of his more recent blues which were new to me: Jewel of Happiness, in mid-blue, and Jane Bonsal, somewhat like Super Ego. I also saw plantings of his 40-chromosome cultivars including the nearly black Id and the yellow King's Forrest and Forrest Scion, as well as Foretell, his extraordinary fertile seedling from a 28 and 40-chr. cross, and some seedlings from it, and last but not least Blue Wilson.

Currently Bill's chief hybridizing interests are in the improvement of whites and the development of yellow and pink 28-chr. cultivars. In the white class his Wing on Wing leads the field in my opinion, even surpassing Mrs. Brummitt's magnificent Anniversary. Since Wing on Wing, Bill has introduced Earthshine, which I have not seen 'in the flesh' but which in pictures

appears to be a more creamy white of lovely ruffled round form. Now, at this visit, I was impressed by the large number of seedlings, still under number, which have lovely form and substance and are even whiter than Wing on Wing. Two especially caught my eye: 74-71-27-W-1, a pure white with no yellow to be seen at the haft, round, ruffled and crisp, and with half-open buds looking like white rosebuds; it is well branched, of average Siberian height, and has handsome, upright and gracefully arching foliage; the other, 71-4-1, is almost identical but is only about two feet tall. I believe Bill prefers the taller of the two but I could not decide which I liked better.

Because of my own interest in the development of yellow 28-chr. Siberians I was particularly interested to see that Bill is making progress in this field also. Among a number of seedlings with yellow coloring which I saw his 74-71-11-Y-2 impressed me especially. It has what I would consider impeccable form with fully round, very ruffled flowers, and falls which are pale yellow all the way to the tips. The color tends to fade to white after a day in the sun, but my own experience makes it clear to me that Bill is well on the way to real yellows of persisting color in flowers with the superb round form which I have come to think of as the 'McGarvey type'.

Bill has been working toward the development of pink Siberians for many years, starting with some pink-toned flowers which came from selfing Royal Ensign. It should be mentioned that he also has named several red ones, including Temper Tantrum, a wine red with some blue near the blaze, and Red Passion, a 'redder' red without the blue tints, which I saw for the first time on this visit. One of his more recent lavender pinks, 72-68-16-2, was much admired at the Roanoke Convention. Since then several which are closest to pink have been introduced, including Augury and Pink Haze with the pinkish color in standards as well as falls, and Pink Snowtop, an amoena. At this visit I also saw many seedlings under number. All had round falls and excellent substance and a number were pinker than those named above. It is only a matter of time, I am sure, before the goal of true pink will be reached. Meanwhile, these lavender-toned ones are lovely in their own right and are entirely distinct from the 'wine pinks' of the past such as Mrs. Rowe, Fairy Dawn, Morning Magic, Carrie Lee, Mildred Peck, Sparkling Rosé and Lavender Light.

I left the McGarveys, uplifted in spirit by their hospitality, the beautiful flowers I had seen, and Bill's demonstration of what a program of wisely selected planned crosses, persisted in faithfully over a period of years, can mean for the future of Siberian irises.

SOME SHOW REPORTS

WHITE SWIRL, exhibited by Mrs. H. R. Hensel, was judged the best Siberian in the Apogon Show, Oklahoma City, Okla., May 17-18 1975.

Sdlg. 70 53 B (WHITE SWIRL X BARBARA'S CHOICE) was the best seedling in the Chicago Show May 31, 1975, competing against all types of iris. It was shown by the originator, Mr. H. E. Briscoe.

THE CULTIVATION OF SIBERIAN IRISES ~ UPDATED 1975

WILLIAM G. MCGARVEY

In the Handbook of Garden Irises by W. R. Dykes, published in 1924, Dykes wrote (p. 90P) "They like a cool, moist soil rich in humus, though most of them will hold their own in any well cultivated ground, enriched with a liberal proportion of old leaf soil or well decayed manure."

Four statements on the culture of Siberians are found in the Randolph book, Garden Irises, published in 1959 by the American Iris Society. The first (p. 60) says "Transplant in early spring or fall (they may die if moved in modsummer.) Planted in rich acid soil in full sun or partial shade (preferably in clumps), they will perform well for years if not disturbed. After planting, pack the soil firmly just under the surface and water thoroughly." The second statement, p. 62, was by Lewis Clevenger and is much more general in that it describes how to cultivate non-bearded irises including Siberians. He said: "The non-bearded types are grown differently, and require a rich soil, slightly on the acid side, with plenty of moisture but with good drainage (add peat if the soil is alkaline). Plant about three inches deep and reset in late September, or early spring with equally good results. These irises are slower in growth than the bearded type and it usually takes two years for them to show up well. Once established, nothing seems to bother them." This statement refers to culture in the central states of the United States. The third statement is by Clarke Cosgrove on p. 72. He describes iris culture on the Pacific Coast. He said: "The Siberians grow well in the southern part of this area only when given a rich soil and an abundance of moisture. Established clumps of CAESAR'S BROTHER put on a brilliant show in many gardens with only ordinary garden care, but other varieties do not thrive as well." The fourth statement, or rather set of statements, is by Willard and Grace Kellogg. It was updated in 1959 from an earlier chapter in the book The Iris, an Ideal Hardy Perennial, published in 1947. The Kellogg comment, on pp. 261 and 262, concerned individual species as well as about the Series. They found that I. delavayi "is particularly well adapted to the edge of pools and bog gardens where in sunlight it sometimes reaches heights of five feet." Concerning I. chrysographes they said "This species . . . prefers moisture and coolness though not to the degree of I. delavayi." They then go on to generalizing about the Siberian series saying "The Siberians are meadow plants in nature. The dense fibrous roots thrive in well-drained soil when it is comparatively rich in humus and abundant moisture is available. We have found they also do well when established in clay or sandy soil, in partial shade or full sun, in dry spots or at the pool edges. It is best to transplant Siberians in early fall or in early spring." Continuing they say: "Divisions of about five fans are placed in holes slightly deeper than the previous planting, and large enough to allow one to spread the roots freely."

It is important to work the soil in firmly, thus eliminating air pockets and the danger of winter heaving. These hybrids do not take kindly to transplanting, so select your location with a view to permanence." "In order for plants not to lose height and their lush green color, apply a top dressing of compost or commercial fertilizer in early spring and again in early July."

HOW GOOD ARE THESE EARLY STATEMENTS?

As a result of a considerable experience and a satisfying success in growing Siberians I would both agree and disagree with each one of them. But no particular purpose would be served by criticizing each in turn so it is my intention to attempt to describe what is right and wrong as I understand the situation from both first hand experience and reading about the experience of others. The reader should find it of interest to compare and contrast the earlier statements with those made by me, and, of course, with their own experience in growing Siberians.

Let us examine what in my mind is the most important generalization that can be made about the Siberian Series: Siberian irises are meadow plants. Considerable evidence exists which demonstrates that this is correct for Siberians growing in natural settings. It seems equally obvious that since this is the case, the characteristics of meadow should be taken into account in any discussion of the cultivation of Siberian irises. Few meadows are well drained. In fact, meadows continue as meadows because they tend to be wet for long periods of each year. Meadow plants, including many grass-like forms, grow in meadows and dry-land plants (tall-bearded irises are dry-land plants) do not. Meadows tend to be humusy because the foliage of each year tends to decay and stay in the meadow rather than fall off and blow away. In meadow conditions in areas with normal rainfall decaying foliage tends toward acidity rather than alkalinity. Meadows are defined in all dictionaries as 'land in grass' and/or as 'moist lowlying land, usually level grassland.' The lowlying refers to the surrounding boundaries which are higher in relation to the meadow. The emphasis on grass grows from the fact that few broadleaved plants of the temperate zones prosper in such conditions but many grasslike plants do. An interesting example of the relationship of broadleaf plants to wet conditions may be found in Arkansas, where the Yearbook of Agriculture for 1957 reports (p. 531) that control of broadleaved weeds in rice fields is achieved by planting to rice for two years following which the fields are given one to two years of 'water fallow.' This means keeping the soil flooded so that the broadleaf weeds are destroyed.

Siberian irises are native to meadows and prosper in such conditions. But don't get the idea that Siberians need swamp or rice-paddy conditions; they don't.

DO WITHOUT SIBERIANS?

Don't jump to this conclusion just because you don't own a meadow. The grace and beauty of Siberians were inducements for flower lovers to grow them and luckily the species first brought into commerce were the ones with 28

chromosomes. There were only two 28-chr. species but they are prolific and a majority of garden Siberians are from hybrids between the two. It just so happens that these plants are much more tolerant of conditions that vary-- even considerably-- from the ideal. The 28- chr. Siberians such as WHITE SWIRL, TEALWOOD, EGO, SUPER EGO, and the older CAESAR'S BROTHER, in fact most of the Siberians in commerce will grow in almost all regular good garden conditions. If you also have a damp spot where the soil contains plenty of humus your 28-chr. plant will grow even better, and you will be well rewarded by including some of the 40-chr. varieties in it. One warning: don't select the spot that is damp because the septic tank drain line ends there; Siberians don't like the chemicals that flow from that situation. About the only plant that seems to enjoy it is the willow tree which enjoys it so much that its roots will enter and fill up your drain line. And one caution about the good garden conditions that are not damp but which will grow the 28-chr. species and their cultivars: don't expect them to grow in raised beds which are wonderful for the tall bearded but anathema to the Siberians.

THE 40 CHROMOSOME VARIETIES.

A majority of the recognized commercial growers of irises will make it clear that an iris they have for sale-- if Siberian-- is either 28 or 40-chr. The registered clones of the pure species of 40-chr. Siberians have decided advantages over the seedlings grown from the so-called 'bee pods' of those species. They are usually more handsome than the haphazard progeny from the bee pods, and more importantly, they are usually stronger plants because they have survived distribution and varied growing conditions.

Even if you are completely lacking in the soil conditions for growing the 40-chr. varieties you don't have to cross them out. If the style and elegance which are found only in the 40-chr. varieties makes it absolutely necessary for you to have them, and if you are willing to expend some energy on their cultivation, they can be yours. You can have them by growing them in a place specially prepared for them. To do this select a place that gets full sun or almost full sun. Then dig a hole that is three feet square and 30 inches deep. This hole must have smooth sides so that when you line it with plastic of substantial thickness so as to have a watertight cell, the plastic won't be punctured by sharp stones in the walls of the cell. The excavated earth should be screened and combined with three bushels of sphagnum peat or well cured humus such as well rotted cow manure. This soil mixture can also have 5 cups of 10-6-4 fertilizer added to it. The mixture is returned to the hole and wet down. It should be allowed to settle and its surface should not be above the surrounding ground level. The upper edges of this cell can be protected by adding a wooden or other appropriate edging though this is not absolutely necessary provided the person who does the weeding can remember where the plastic is located, and since the lower section of the cell is its important part it won't matter too much if the upper edge is damaged slightly. The acidity- pH, or relative acidity- should be measured in the neighborhood of 5.8 (a pH of 7 is neutral, one of 5.8 is acid, and one of 8 is alkaline.) Four or five 40-chr. Siberians can

be grown in such a cell. Soil in the cell should be kept damp but not wet during the spring, summer and early fall. If it gets wet from melting snow or rain in the spring there is no reason for concern since the excess will run off and the 40-chr. Siberians enjoy fairly long periods of real wet. The crown of the plants should be slightly (one inch) above the surrounding ground level as would be true for them planted under regular garden conditions. A handful of 10-6-4 can be placed around each plant in the early spring and again in early summer. This should be scratched in for best results. After five or six years the plants in the cell should be lifted and reduced to five-fan divisions before replanting. At this time the soil in the cell should be dug out and renewed. For the dedicated gardener, the Connoisseur, this technique requires small effort for the large rewards in pleasure from the beauty which results.

PEAT.

A bit must be said concerning peat since it is quite a variable substance. There are two broad classifications of peat: 1. sphagnum peat which comes from bogs that were built up from species of the sphagnum plant and maintained under airless conditions for centuries, and 2. sedge and reed peat which, while formed in the same way, is much more variable in a number of ways. Of particular importance is the fact that sphagnum peat is very acid having pH values between 3 and 4.5. Sedge and reed peat may have pH values between 3.5 and 7. Since 7 pH is neutral it is obvious that the additions of peat with such values may or may not change soil characteristics very radically. A correspondent living in Germany reported problems in growing I. forrestii which were removed when he replanted the iris in soil lacking peat moss. Since the previous location was high in peat moss it seemed obvious that this was the offending element. This could be explained if an already acid soil had large amounts of low-pH peat added to it since Siberians like a pH close to pH 5.5 to 5.9; or equally, if a near neutral soil had some pH 7 peat added to it the results would not be favorable to the 40-chr. varieties. If we knew more about the characteristics of the soil and the peat moss in the situation described it would be possible to make a better estimate of what was wrong and why. My own experience indicates that sphagnum peat is generally the more useful. It can be taken for granted that sphagnum peat will add to the acidity so it is good to know what the additions of a particular batch of peat has done to the pH of your Siberian garden.

WATER: RAIN, WELL, AND MUNICIPAL.

Water is a most significant influence on your success in growing Siberians. Even after you have prepared your soil to be correctly acid rather than neutral or alkaline this correct condition cannot be maintained if you pour large amounts of alkaline water on it to water your plants. Rain water is seldom any problem since it tends to be slightly acid. But well water in the arid areas of the country and almost all municipal water supplies are alkaline. Municipal water supplies are usually alkaline because of residual materials and because of the techniques used to remove foreign and harmful

substances. Beyond this, there are areas in the United States (Southern California, for example) where the domestic water supplies are highly alkaline before any purifying chemicals are added to them. A single good soaking with strongly alkaline water could shift the pH of the soil around plant roots from acid to alkaline. This could stop or kill off growth.

One way to counteract the effects of alkaline water is to spread a quarter-pound of the following combination of materials to each hundred square feet of soil before watering it with your alkaline water: Equal parts

Colloidal sulphur

Iron Sulfate (ferrous sulfate, green vitriol)

Aluminum Sulfate

Ammonium Sulfate

Another, and perhaps a better way, would be to mix a water solution of the same materials and put it in the mixing chamber of one of the many apparatuses available for applying sprays by means of the flow of water from a hose. It should be noted that most of the natural things said to increase the acidity of the soil won't do so in any effective way (oak leaves, for example, have little or no effect on soil acidity.) The acidified water solution coming from the hose in the technique just recommended could easily be tested for its pH and made more or less acid as conditions require.

Where I live, in Central New York, such practices are seldom necessary, although we do have some salt ponds and salt marshes in the Syracuse area, but they would be needed in any area where both soil and water are alkaline. Any good gardener should know the pH of his soil and water supply.

TRANSPLANTING AND PURCHASE

One thing all authorities agree on is that transplanting Siberians is better done in September after the rains have given the new roots a chance to begin growth. This means that when the new roots are half an inch to an inch and a half long is a good time to lift and divide for replanting. Since Siberians can be allowed to grow in one clump for many years (I have some prosperous clumps that have not been lifted in 15 years and I know of others that have been in one place for much longer periods of time.) If Siberians are lifted soon after new root growth has started and if the roots are not allowed to dry out, these roots will continue to grow and will give the transplant a good start. If great tender loving care is given to plants early in the spring reasonably good success can be obtained by moving them at that time. It is necessary to make sure that the soil around newly transplanted Siberians is not allowed to dry out. Whenever Siberian irises are transplanted the crown should be located close to the level of the surrounding soil, the roots should be spread carefully and the earth around each plant should be pressed down firmly. A small dam should be built up around each plant so that water may be directed down into the soil and around the roots of the plant. The soil in the new location should be well dug and humus (peat or other) added if necessary. The hole for the transplant should be large enough so that the roots may be nicely spread and the crown be located at

ground level.

If a bit of care is used when Siberian plants are dug from the ground success in transplanting is considerably increased. I have found that digging old clumps is made far easier when I use a drain spade (mine has a blade which is 15 inches long. it is 6 inches across the upper blade end and 4 inches just above the rounded lower end.) When digging in the fall- after the new root growth has started- it is much less important to preserve the old roots than it is when digging in the spring or any other time. This is true because when new root growth has started it will soon take over the job of providing water and chemicals from the soil. As noted before, spring digging should be done, when necessary, with care to preserve as much root as possible.

The way the spade- any spade- is inserted in the soil around a plant that is being dug has a large influence on the preservation of its root system. The right way is not difficult. If the center of the plant to be dug is thought of as the hub of a wheel, and if the spade is inserted as though it were in line with the spokes of that wheel fewer roots are cut than when the spade is inserted on a circle around the plant. (It could be put in far away from the plant but that takes much more digging.) As the spade is inserted at first it can be pried a bit but no attempt should be made to really lift the plant during the first round of insertions. Having gone all round the plant, a second set of insertions should be made in the same cuts as before but this time the prying motion should be more vigorous, and the second round should lift the plant. If no drain spade is available an ordinary spade will serve but it should be inserted around the plant in the spoke fashion. Since an ordinary spade won't go as deep as the drain spade a bit more damage will be done to the roots but if the plant is replanted quickly after being dug in the spring the operation should be a success. If the Siberian plant is to be shipped, or must be out of the ground for any length of time, digging should be done in the fall after new root growth has started.

Purchased plants should arrive with damp peat around the roots and in a plastic bag with the foliage tied above the roots and out of the bag so that it does not heat and begin to rot. (Some growers use damp shredded newspaper around the roots which seems to be just as useful as the peat provided the plants do not have to remain in it for more than 10 or 12 days.) Purchased divisions will vary considerably with respect to the number of fans. New introductions may be sold as single fans and older ones with from 3 to 5 fans. The single fan division will grow just as well as those with more fans but it will develop into a clump more slowly. It is usually better to ask that Siberians be shipped by Airmail. When received it is good to open the package at once and put the roots in water for a two hour period before planting. As is true for planting Siberians at any time after the new roots have begun to grow, care should be taken to avoid damage to those roots.

Care of the new transplant over the first winter is important. Whenever

possible I have mulched with salt hay because it does not carry weed seeds that will grow in my garden. But clean straw, evergreen tree branches, and peat will all serve very well provided some method is used to prevent their blowing away. As soon as the weather is warm enough so that there is no longer any danger of freezing (which produces the heaving and root damage) hay or straw should be lifted because it becomes a harbor for snails and slugs.

HYBRIDS BETWEEN 28 AND 40 CHROMOSOME SPECIES

Almost all of the Siberians in commerce are hybrids but most of them are hybrids between the two 28-chr. species. Ever since the introduction of the 40-chr. species by various travelers and plant hunters just before and after the turn of the century hybridizers have been making crosses between the two groups. Such crosses have been quite successful but until recently all of the progeny have been mules- sterile. Some handsome garden plants have resulted from such crosses and with the break in the sterility barrier (FORETELL, from *I. forrestii*, 40-chr., crossed with a 28-chr. plant, which is fertile) there will be many more. These plants exhibit hybrid vigor but they still seem to prefer growing conditions similar to those for the 40-chr. species.

TROUBLES

Siberians have fewer troubles than most irises, in fact, than most garden plants, but things can be done to them to cause them to behave very badly. Some few years ago I received a frantic phone call from one of the world's most experienced iris gardeners. The report was that the Siberians in a very large collection of them were dying in rows. After considerable discussion it was decided that all of the dying Siberians were in beds that had been reworked and replanted some months before. These beds had large amounts of only partly decomposed wood-chips worked into them. If these wood-chips had actually been decomposed and converted into humus the result would have been fine but the intermediate stage of their decomposition was dangerous, in fact destructive. Transplanted to better soil, the dying process was stopped and growth resumed.

Occasionally iris borers do attack Siberians. When this is the case the techniques used to eliminate them from the tall bearded are effective.

EACH SIBERIAN IRIS IS AN INDIVIDUAL

Dr. Currier McEwen in his excellent article 'Nomenclature of Siberian Irises' in the Fall 1974 issue of *The Siberian Iris*, pp. 11-14, made an important point when he said "Series *Sibiricae* includes two distinct groups... which have somewhat different cultural requirements." This statement is certainly correct in my experience but with these qualifications: if plants from both groups are grown in conditions that tend to be favorable to the 40-chr. varieties they will all prosper, and if the gardener will pay individual attention to each individual plant he will discover that small variations in growing conditions can make the difference for each plant between

one that merely survives and one that really prospers. Growing two pieces of the same plant in two places in your garden will frequently make this point obvious. The French, pleased with the fact that men and women are different, say 'Vive la difference!' May I suggest that for Siberian iris gardeners it will profit us to feel much the same way about our varieties.

DEAR MRS. SANDY SOIL

Marlene Ahlburg and Roy Davidson (not in collaboration!)

Marlene writes:

In the last number of TSI I read about your sandy, gritty garden soil; well, my garden is a former asparagus field, which means sandy, meager and dry. When the sewer lines for our house were laid we dug two and a half meters deep (over 8 feet) and had no ground water! But I like Siberians, so I helped them by planting them first in little plastic household baskets with closed bottoms and latticed sides (Marlene's drawing shows a thing like a large tomato or strawberry box, about 5" deep and 9-10" square.) I filled them with good soil above a bottom layer of peat. The baskets were then sunk in the ground enough so the plastic didn't show. I used them first to prevent the Siberians being eaten by big voles (a small mouselike rodent that eats plant roots and bulbs) but found that they do retain enough water to be helpful to the Siberians, water which would otherwise drain away so quickly.

Another method I thought of was to build a swamp with a layer of heavy foil. I had read in an old issue of our German Iris News that Mr. Max Steiger who was the hybridizer of the lime-resistant strain of Japanese irises, had planted his irises in this manner; so I thought, what is good for them could be good for the Siberians also. (The drawing shows an arrangement similar to Prof. McGarvey's instructions on p. 9 of this issue, with the surface of the soil slightly lower than that of the surrounding ground.) Why do I not grow TB's? They like my garden! Funny that one always wants to grow the difficult plants; more adventurous?

Roy writes:

To help those whose soil is sterile, dry and sandy- the situation isn't impossible, although it might entail a lot of work and a little expense. Proceed as if you were making a large raised bed with bottom, except that these will be sunken beds. Dig out and lay aside 2 to 3 feet of the sandy soil from a suitable area; you can dispose of most of it as it is due to be replaced. Line the area with heavy-mil plastic. Then beg, borrow, buy or (?) (can the man mean steal??) some loam and very old manure, or if you've been keeping an ancient compost pit here is the time to use it. Mix a rich friable soil and fill the 'sunken raised-bed', but not before you have punctuated it with a spading fork for drainage. Fill it extra-full as it will settle. Then plant. I know seashore people who have made this a standard practice and it works. Without the plastic the soil will just leach away into the sand.

REGISTRATIONS AND INTRODUCTIONS OF SIBERIANS AND HYBRIDS, 1974

The first item of business is that the AIS Board of Directors voted to legitimize the accepted spelling of CAESAR instead of the registered form CAEZAR. Now if we can just get a good full description of Grey Dove we can hope to have it registered as well. Can anyone help on this?

ATOLL (B. Warburton, R. 1974) # 72-3dip. Sib., 35", L-TB, L-FVB1bg6DDVB/
L/FBV6DDVB. S. dark violet blue shaded paler at center with marbling; style
arms pearly blue with turquoise midribs nearly covering signal; F. dark
violet-blue rim with centers of marbled light to full violet-blue. WHITE
SWIRL X 69A-4 (sib to DEEP SHADE).

*AUGURY (McGarvey, Sib., R. 1973) I. Old Brook 1973.

BLUE ROSETTE (Clara Puett, r. 1974) # P-70. Sib., M, 35", FB/FB. Full blue
self. WHITE SWIRL X unknown.

DARK DESIRE (D. S. Varner, r. 1974, i. Illini 1974) # V222. Sib., 36", VB-M,
DVB/DVB. Deep blue-purple self; no signal. WHITE SWIRL X TEALWOOD.

ECHO TWO (J. Witt, r. 1974) # S-1. Sib. (40-chr.), 42", Re.-June, Aug., Oct.,
VB/VBcmY. Between Munsell 10PB 4/10 and 10PB 3/10 purple-blue; large yellow
signal spotted in violet. Unknown (presumed to be an advance-generation
I. clarkii hybrid) X unknown.

ENICE J. (B. Blyth, R. 1974) Sib., 24", E-M-L, L-FB/L-FB. Light to mid-blue
self. Unknown parentage.

FOND REVELATION (M. Reinhardt, R. 1974) # S73-2. Sib., 24", M, LBSFB/FBSDB.
S. light blue with medium blue midrib stripe; F. medium blue with dark
blue ray halo. WHITE SWIRL X McGarvey sdlg.

ILLINI CHARM (D. S. Varner, r. 1974) # V273. Sib., 24", EML, 5LRV&DRV/5LRV&DRV.
Light wine and lilac. Sensenbach #6 X TEALWOOD. HC 1974.

LETITIA (D. Varner, R. 1974) # 050. Sib., 30", EM, DB/VBSW. S. deep blue; F.
blue-purple; white signal. TEALWOOD X MANDY MORSE.

*MARANATHA (Varner, Sib., r. 1973) I. Illini Iris 1974.

MARLYA (D. S. VARNER, r. 1974, i. Illini Iris 1974) # 1154. Sib., 34", ML,
SDVB/FVB. S. deep blue with slight purple influence (RHS 102A); F. slightly
lighter. GATINEAU X DREAMING SPIRES. H. C. 1974.

*NAVY BRASS (McEwen, Sib., r. 1973) i. McEwen 1974.

NEW WINE (D. S. Varner, r. 1974) # 1133. Sib., 35", ML, DVR1b/DVR6DDVR. S.
wine red, aqua blue style arms; F. rich wine red, slightly deeper at edge.
JIMMY'S GEM X Sensenbach # 14. HC 1973.

PIRATE PRINCE (D. S. Varner, r. 1974) # 1279. Sib., 34", ML, DB/DB. S. deep
blue; F. same, ruffled; stylearms ruffled and elliptical. TEALWOOD X BLUE
MOON.

SAVOIR FAIRE (S. DuBose, r. 1974, i. Melrose 1974) # SIB #1. Sib., 36", EM,
DV/DVBY. Cobalt violet self; small yellow signal. TUNKHANNOCK X SWANK.
HC 1973.

*SILVER EDGE (McEwen, Sib., r. 1973) I. McEwen 1974.

*SNOW BOUNTY (McEwen, Sib., r. 1973) I. McEwen 1974.

*SOOTHYSAYER (K. Vaughn, Sib., r. 1973) I. Old Brook 1974.

STARSTEPS (B. Hager, r. 1974, i. Melrose 1974) # SB8. Sib., 26", M, W/WBY.

White self, yellow spear. WHITE SWIRL X I. sibirica Nana (Actually this is a registered cultivar, SIBIRICA NANA.)

*TAWNY PIPIT (McEwen, Sib., r. 1973) I. McEwen 1974.

*TIMELESS (Larry Harder, Sib., r. 1968) I. Maple Tree Gardens 1974.

*VI LUIHN (S. DuBose, Sib., r. 1973) I. Melrose 1974.

That's it for this trip. 13 registrations and 9 introductions of earlier registrations. Interesting to note that of the 13, 5 have WHITE SWIRL as a parent and another has it as a grandparent, through DREAMING SPIRES while ATOLL carries a lolloping big dose, with WHITE SWIRL as one parent, one grandparent- which adds up to 75%. TEALWOOD appears in four parentages. In case you haven't tried hybridizing with Siberians these are two good parents to start with. WHITE SWIRL does have pollen, but it is not all that easy to pry out, so a beginner might find it simpler to use it as the pod parent; but TEALWOOD crosses quite readily either way. Both give a high percentage of good offspring. Try it, kids!

FRED CASSEBEER- A TRIIBUTE.

I think we were all shocked, though those who were close to him were not too surprised, to learn of Mr. Cassebeer's death last spring. He had been active in AIS affairs for so many years, had served a tour as Editor of the Bulletin, had bred so many fine irises. To us of the Society for Siberian Irises he was Mr. Siberian, the raiser of four Morgan Award winners- WHITE SWIRL, VIOLET FLARE, BLUE BRILLIANT and PIROUETTE as well as several other fine ones.

For most of his adult life he had operated the Cassebeer Drug Store in midtown Manhattan which had been run by his family for several generations and which was a landmark to many old New Yorkers. He was a noted photographer whose pictures illustrated many books and articles on horticulture and flower arrangement. His home and garden in West Nyack, N. Y., on the shore of Lake De Forest was a place of pilgrimage for iris lovers from all over the country, and formed one of the tour gardens at two AIS conventions, Newark 1961 and Newark 1966. Those of us who attended either of these will never forget those expanses of lovely colors leading down to the glittering water. Nor will we forget the hospitality of Fred and his wife and son.

His later years were saddened by the deaths of, first his son, a bright young man in college who had promised to be another fine irisarian, and then his wife, as well as a stroke which put an end to most of his work both with the camera and with the hybridizing tweezers. But he is survived by a growing number of 'grandchildren' as Siberian breeders continue to use WHITE SWIRL to produce more fine irises. We will remember him.

M. S. E.

LAUNDERING IRIS SEEDS

MARLENE AHLBURG

One day last winter an iris friend brought me a gift of about 250 seeds of Siberian irises! Sure, nobody can be that rich by legal means! He had stolen them for me from the park of the castle at Celle, you might say 'under the nose of the Duke' (don't worry; the poor old chap died long ago.) Never mind, they were now mine, and as I probably will never have such a lot of seeds to squander again, I decided to make a little experiment. I do not know if anyone has done this previously; if so, this is at least a control.

I divided the seeds into two lots of 125 each. First I soaked both lots five days in pure water which I renewed every day. At the end of this time I removed any seeds floating on top. Part A (the left side of the photograph) was allowed to soak another two days in the clear water; Part B, at the right of the picture, was transferred to a plastic bag with small holes I poked in it with a knitting needle. I fastened the bag round the opening of a faucet which was left open slightly so that a trickle of water went through the bag and drained out the holes. This continued two days and a night. At the end of this time both lots were planted into a seed flat. If you look at the picture you can see that on the right side (Part B) there are many more seedlings germinated than in the group of Part A, on the left side. I counted the germinated seedlings:

Part A (left side) 54 seedlings; 43.2% germination

Part B (right side) 98 seedlings; 78.4% germination.

This means that the germination rate was in this case nearly doubled by washing out the seeds.

All the seeds came from the same bag, and were well mixed before dividing them. As they had been in the pods a long time they were all brown, dry and wrinkled. Both portions had been cleared of the floaters, and both were sowed in the same flat and given the same treatment and care. As far as I can see, the result indicates that an inhibitor of germination exists in the seed of I. sibirica (these were presumably pure species) or at least I have reason to think such an inhibitor exists, which must be water soluble and might be responsible for delayed germination in which seeds sometimes do not come up in the first year but wait till a second year.

In any case I will repeat this procedure with my more interesting crosses in future to see if I can again encourage higher germination.

If anyone knows of a similar experiment having been tried I would appreciate hearing about it and what results were obtained.

(P. S. from Peg: We would like to hear of any other experiments that may have been tried with the aim of improving germination of Siberian seeds. Failures can be as useful in this respect as successes.)

**PHOTOGRAPH OF THE
AHLBURG SEED FLAT**

The seedlings are
plainly much thicker
on the right side
than on the left.



A SIBERIAN JUDGES' TRAINING SESSION- Sunday, June 1, 1975 in New Jersey.



From left: Ira Wood, instructor; Dave Walsh; Helen Leavitt; Steve Zdepski, Treasurer of the Garden State Iris Society; Dave Silverberg; Nan Rogers; Norman Noe, RVP of Region 19 and President of Garden State Iris Society.

INTERNATIONAL IRIS MEETING , FRANCE, 1977.

We recently have been sent a letter from the Société Française Des Iris Et Plantes Bulbeuses announcing that the Society's Board of Directors are planning an international meeting at which exhibitors of several nations are expected to be represented. The Secretary General, M. Roger Renard, writes, in part:

"We are contacting professional growers of Tall Bearded Irises, Dwarfs, Spurias, Sibiricas, Californians, Louisianas, Kaempferi, etc. inviting them to contribute some of their creations and to enter the competition. I point out to you that (unfortunately) only TB irises are well known in this country. It would be a good occasion to let French people know the latest advancements in other hybrids in this large and beautiful genus Iris. The Irises will be planted in the 'Parc de la Source' of Orléans in France, a magnificent garden where members of our Society (have) put on display some 7,000 irises. Now that Tall Bearded irises are better known and appreciated by the general French public we wish to avail ourselves of this Meeting in giving an opportunity to the interested visitors to compare the merits and attractions of other specialties such as Spurias, Sibiricas, Louisianas, Arilbreds and more. No doubt, American hybridizers are leaders in this field and we look to them to assist us in making their creations better known.

"Each year at the beginning of June the IRIS CRITERIUM held in the above-mentioned Floral Parc receives thousands of visitors. They take part in the competition designating the five most beautiful varieties of the year. Several members of the American Iris Society have already taken part in this very popular competition.

"Therefore, if you are interested in this meeting, we ask you to send as soon as possible THREE PLANTS EACH of your most interesting plants worthy of entering this competition to the following address:

"M. Marcel TURBAT, President du Parc Floral de La Source
45.000 Orléans, France."

(signed: Roger Renard)

The Parc de la Source is named for the spring (source) which is the source (in the English meaning of the word) of the Loiret which flows into the Loire to the west of Orleans. The city itself is about 80 miles south of Paris and is still a tourist attraction to the French as its Cathedral was the site of the coronation of the kings of France for many centuries; it is of course also associated with Jeanne d'Arc. It seems likely that if you send any irises to this competition they will be seen by large numbers of French amateurs of gardening. It should provide a good opportunity to promote Siberian irises in a place where they apparently are not as well known as some of us would undoubtedly like.

A few words of warning are perhaps in order. (You can safely ignore

the use of the term 'professional' in the letter; to most Europeans the idea of amateur plant breeders is still somewhat strange- as it is to a lot of Americans who are not iris nuts, or daylily or African Violet nuts- or just plain gardening nuts) The primary difficulty is in getting the plants to the garden in time for them to develop well by bloom time, 1977. By the time this issue reaches you it will be too late for most of you to send plants this year; this means that spring shipment would be advisable and certainly whether you ship in earliest spring or wait till late summer, you would need to ship by Airmail. During the winter you should write to M. Turbat about any restrictions there may be on importing plants into France; unless you are quite proficient in reading French, you can request an answer in English. You will probably need to have the plants inspected before shipping- now is the time to find out where and when you could have this done- laws vary from state to state and from province to province. Even the possession of a nursery license might not be sufficient in itself to insure that your plants will not suffer from delays en route. If there are questions in your mind as to how the Siberians will be grown at the garden, and you'd like an 'outside opinion' you could write M. Renard at 134, Avenue Savorgnan de Brazza
83160 La Valette-du-Var
C. C. P. Marseille 756.13
France.

Go to it, and have fun.

REBLOOMING SIBERIAN IRISES

Currier McEwen

It is obvious that the capacity to rebloom consistently is a valuable characteristic in any flower and especially in those like irises which ordinarily have a blooming period of only a few weeks. The increasing interest in the remontant bearded irises is, therefore, not surprising; and it is good to see that interest spreading also to growers of Siberians. My own interest in reblooming Siberians was stimulated in 1972 by an unusual amount of rebloom in our garden not only in well-known plants like MY LOVE and VIOLET REPEAT, both of which were new acquisitions, but also from several of my own seedlings. Notable among these were 68/78 A and B derived from my seedling 64/72 X WHITE MAGNIFICENCE. That cross had been made with no thought of obtaining rebloomers but in retrospect, I noted that WHITE MAGNIFICENCE often sends up a few reblooming scapes and in the book in which I record crosses I find the notation regarding 64/72 that it was 'the last in the garden to bloom (July 9th) and it was early also'. Up to that time I had made no crosses with reblooming in mind but in 1972, on the basis of the excellent late show which MY LOVE, 68/72 A and B and others were putting on, I made a number of crosses specifically in the hope of enhancing this valuable characteristic. All of the seedlings resulting from these crosses were treated with colchicine in the spring of 1973 in order to obtain some

tetraploids. As is inevitable with this treatment a good many died from the effect of colchicine but 26 survived. A number of them bloomed in 1974 but none rebloomed. However, in 1975 rebloom has been impressive. For some reason, probably because of the setback resulting from treatment with colchicine, seven did not bloom this year, but of the 19 which did, 10 rebloomed and did so abundantly. The two best ones in this regard were derived from a cross of 68/78 B x MY LOVE. One, a diploid, put up 9 scapes originally and 9 more at rebloom. The other, a tetraploid, showed 12 scapes first and then 10 at rebloom. Its total duration of rebloom was fifty days, from May 30 to July 20 with only about 10 days without flowers in late June.

It should be noted that rebloom in Siberian (and Japanese) irises differs from that in the bearded irises which tend to rebloom after a rest period of two months or so. In contrast, the waiting period between the end of first bloom and the start of rebloom is only a few weeks in the case of the Siberians and Japanese; and in some, which may be called continuous bloomers, new scapes start to appear as the last of the first round of bloom is fading.

My experience to date is limited but leaves no doubt, I believe, that the reblooming tendency is genetically controlled and hence can be enhanced by planned crosses of the most consistent rebloomers. Furthermore, the experience thus far indicates that Siberians having the capacity to rebloom are apt to do so only after they are thoroughly established and are growing well. Each time I have divided and transplanted cultivars like my 64/72, 68/78 A and B, MY LOVE and others they have failed to rebloom until the second or even third year after they were moved.

Among my present group of 21 reblooming Siberian seedlings, 5 are induced tetraploids or chimeras and two others are tetraploids of advanced generations. Their reblooming behavior appears to be identical with that of the diploids but they have the characteristic tetraploid features of deeper green, sturdier foliage and larger flowers of greater substance and richer colors. This year I have harvested several hundred seeds from both diploid and tetraploid rebloomers and the resulting seedlings should permit further comparisons in a few years. One may anticipate that with planned breeding, rebloom will become increasingly consistent and abundant. What that will mean in the garden was dramatically impressed on me early this July when one small section of our Siberian iris planting was bright with blue flowers while all the rest was green.

The group of hybridizers whom I know with a particular interest in reblooming Siberians includes Mrs. Jennifer Hewitt and John Baxendale in England and Mrs. Marlene Ahlburg in Germany. I am sure there are others also with this interest and hope they will write about their experience.

(So do we all of us! I'd certainly like to run some more on this subject if anyone has anything to report. -Peg.)

KEEPING COMPANY

Peg Edwards

In previous issues there have been several articles, by myself and others, about plants that can be grown among the Siberians to good effect in order to provide color in the dull season (that is, any time the irises are not blooming.) But I have recently heard of or experienced myself several combinations I don't believe have been mentioned. Of course I could pull out the whole file and read them all to make sure, but at the moment I don't feel quite up to it!

One suggestion is to interplant the Siberians in a rose bed. I have seen this done and it does look very attractive; the irises provided colors that the roses lacked, and those colors blended very harmoniously. The blues and purples of the Siberians seem to intensify the reds and yellows of the roses- and vice versa. Judicious placement of the varying heights of the Siberians allowed the tallest ones to overtop the roses toward the back of the bed while some of the smaller irises, set well in front, or between lower growing varieties of roses, were well positioned for looking down on. The grower helped matters along nicely by his pruning methods for the rosebushes; none was allowed to grow too large for its companions. Care of both kinds of plants is sufficiently similar so that no problem of any seriousness seemed to interfere in a successful planting. But of course the effect was only available during the spring bloom period- there aren't very many Siberians that will bloom when the roses make their big fall splurge. Still, if you like to grow roses as well as Siberians, you might try them together.

A small planting of Siberians in a bed to themselves in a friend's garden was overplanted with the deep purplish-bronze form of Ajuga which found a happy home in the spaces between the irises. Ajuga roots are not deep-running and do not interfere with the roots of the Siberians, and the owner of this planting says it is not difficult to pull out the occasional plant that crowds too close to the base of an iris. The total effect is very attractive: the bright blue spires (which to me look like tiny pagodas rising above their foliage) enlivened the area while the Siberians were just beginning to make their spring growth, and lasted almost until the first Siberian bloomstalks reached their blooming height. When the irises began to bloom there was no competition for attention; the spraying foliage of the iris simply had a backup of deep bronze which was present but not obtrusive, letting one enjoy the coloring of the irises. And after bloom, there was a harmonious blending of the green iris leaves and the purple Ajuga, which lasted till well into the fall. Then all winter the Ajuga had the bed to themselves, and as, at least in this climate, it keeps its looks quite well, the result was attractive. As companions they get along well. The Ajuga helps keep weeds to a minimum, while the foliage of the irises provides shade enough to make the Ajuga happy in the hot summer sunlight.

Three years ago I tried something; I had ordered some lily bulbs, mostly July bloomers, intending to put them in another part of the garden. But the area I meant to use them in was, at the time the bulbs arrived, putting on such a good display of annuals (which had sulked all summer) that I didn't want to disturb them. What to do? I could, of course, hold the bulbs for a month, till cold weather would put the annuals out of commission. But I don't like to keep lilies out of the ground; they never really go dormant until the ground is frozen. So someplace had to be found quickly. The only spot I could see was in the iris bed, where there were a few gaps in the planting, mostly through the center of the bed. So in went the lilies. The result was delightful. Of a dozen varieties planted only one was lost in the three winters they have spent here; the other eleven have done well and have increased. By the time the lilies are making their early growth the various irises are leafing out nicely and providing to the lilies the shade they need at ground level to keep the bulbs and roots cool. And yet the irises do not grow too tall for the lily foliage, which needs to be in the sun. About the time the last irises have curled up and died, the first of the lilies is nicely budded, and bloom in this first planting provided a series of focal points through July and into August. Stalks ranged from less than two feet to nearly six feet, bloom lasted on individual plants from about ten days to nearly three weeks, and colors varied from white through yellows and oranges to pinks and reds, and except for the Mid-Century Hybrids which I really believe would grow enthusiastically even in pure sand, I have never had such good results from any other planting of lilies. They must like the company of the irises.

I am so happy with this result that when, this summer, I remade the iris bed, I ordered several more lilies to be interplanted in the same way. I'm looking forward to next spring and summer. A few words of advice might be helpful, however, to anyone wanting to try the same device: you should either confine your choice of lilies to those normally blooming in July and August, or if you do want some blooming along with the irises, stick to those having white or pastel coloring on fairly tall stalks. I think it would take a fairly strong stomach to endure the sight of one of the strongly colored orangy red lilies- particularly one with very glossy petals- blooming within eye-range of some of the more magenta-tinged purples, or even worse, near some of the delicate pastel pinks and lavenders! Also, for this purpose, I wouldn't favor trying to plant cold-storage lilies which are available in the spring from many sources (I don't think too highly of spring-planted lilies in any case unless you can be certain that they have not sprouted more than an inch above the bulb.) Spring-planted lilies have to make all their root growth at the same time as they make the top growth and this can be just too much for them. Soil for lilies should be prepared at least 18" deep and for most should be fairly rich and nourishing. Nothing low-calorie.

Another happy companion for irises and particularly for Siberians is the simple little annual *Portulaca*. Seed can be sown fairly early in spring

after the bed has been cleared of any remaining dead foliage, winter mulch, or other unwanted materials. By late June the little plants should be spreading nicely over the ground and the many colorful clusters of flowers will go on blooming until quite cold weather. It is advisable to use some thin sort of summer mulch after the seedlings are well up, as *Portulaca* doesn't make the kind of thick groundcover that can control chickweed, crabgrass and the other plaguey annuals. I use buckwheat hulls as a summer mulch, about 1 to 1 ½ inches deep, and most of it holds over well for two or three years without renewing; other similar mulches would do as well. I never planted *Portulaca* among my irises but it turned up one year in a new planting of Siberians probably from seed that had survived a couple of years underground and then had been returned to the surface when I prepared the bed for the irises (it is astounding how long some small delicate-looking seeds can survive; when I did over the iris bed this year, my husband followed almost in my footprints in reseeding the adjacent lawn, so I was unable to get to the bed to weed for almost a month. When I was able to get to it again I found five plants of *Nicotiana*- something that we had not grown here for almost 15 years! Since our neighbors hadn't grown it either it must have survived somehow all that time in the ground too deep to sprout until this churning-up brought it back in reach of sunlight again.)

One idea for keeping the irises company I have not tried myself as yet though perhaps if some of my plants don't survive the winter I might use this in the gaps- there's no room for it right now. That is the use of potted houseplants set in among the perennials. I do know one garden where this has been done for several years now in a mixed border. Two sets of pots are involved. One set is used for houseplants which live indoors from Labor Day to Memorial Day, the other set is planted with spring bulbs- tulips and daffodils in the largest pots, hyacinths and the smaller narcissi in the medium-size pots, crocus, scilla, grape hyacinth and other small bulbs in fairly small pots. Memorial weekend she goes through the planting and removes the pots which are then set behind the toolshed to ripen off, and puts the houseplants out in their places. The process is then reversed Labor Day weekend. The pot-holes are carefully prepared for this process with a layer of gravel at the bottom, but this is something that only needs to be done once; the holes are not left empty long enough for the gravel to get mussed up or the sides of the holes to fall in. Naturally you'd need to use some common sense about this project; obviously you wouldn't put out in a sunny spot some plant with velvety leaves that would be robbed of half its attractions if sun and rain afflicted the foliage or a tropical plant that never sees the sun in the deep shade of its habitat, nor would you put a sun lover in the shade of the heavy foliage of a vigorous TB. But this could be a help both to the houseplants and to the gardener who always seems to leave the moving of the plants (in or out) until about three weeks later than it should be done; this system could encourage you to mark the dates in red ink on your calendar so you wouldn't forget them.

There are of course many other plants that can be grown well with your irises and require similar treatment, and for most of us who don't have large enough properties to allow of a separate garden for the irises, interplanting is necessary if we are to enjoy the garden through the year. Most of these plans, like the ones mentioned here, involve planting the companions among the irises. But if the iris planting is going to be seen from one side- as would be the case, for instance, if the flowers are set in the back border of a town or suburban property- there is another option. One could leave a band at the front edge of the border, perhaps two feet deep, with the irises behind this and the companions set in front of them so that when the irises are finished blooming the others are just reaching a size to conceal the dead or dying stalks. For this sort of planting I would think the most useful guests of the irises would be either taller-growing annuals or plants such as dahlias or mums which for best results are grown from stored tubers or freshly rooted cuttings started each spring from the old crown. In other words, the guests should be such that they are not in the way in spring when one wants to enjoy and work with the irises but would then grow into bushy little plants that would provide color from July or August to cold weather.

After all, irises just aren't that wildly exciting when they are done flowering for the year- not if you like to sit in the back yard and enjoy the scenery. Except, of course, for helping you to daydream about next year's bloom.

THE ANNUAL AUCTION

At the time of writing I have not heard how we made out financially but by the look of things, the amount of bidding and the quantity of things bid on, we should have something nice to show for it. (Something more, that is, than the weight-gain resulting from the good food.)

For the first time in our history we had a chilly, wet day for the auction. If we can continue good weather and bad on this same percentage, we'll have no complaints. It didn't pour buckets; it just drizzled most of the time from about 10:30 AM, and the temperature, which the day before had been in the 70's, dropped during the night to not much above 40 and only rose slowly so that by the time we finished lunch and went out to the garage for the sale it was probably in the upper 50's. But never mind; we swathed ourselves in sweaters, raincoats, and (in one case) a long skirt, and made out all right. And after all, when you're all mizzable together, you ain't quite so mizzable.

By 9:30 that Sunday the first workers were hard at it, dividing and bagging the last few plants, making coffee (for which there was a considerable demand) and laying out the platters for the buffet lunch. By ten, the cars were beginning to line up on the grass beside the driveway and Prof. McGarvey

was busy setting up the new Traveling Exhibit of SSI- a collection of very handsome enlarged color prints of various Siberians. At this point everyone was assuring everyone else that it wasn't going to start raining till late afternoon, so these were outdoors under the apple trees, and as each new arrival walked over to join the rest, the pictures were a real attention getter and quite a little mob scene was building up. By 10:30 we had moved indoors for the morning program of talk, slides, Q. & A. by Betty Wood, Bill McGarvey and Currier McEwen. We always have a planned program but somehow everybody seems to get roped into the act, which is more fun- and more to the point, turns out more educational as well, since two opinions on the same point will result in either agreement by both, which is reinforcing, or disagreement, which usually pinpoints some factor involving differences in soil, climate or culture that the dogmatic assertions of a single speaker might not reveal. At any rate, Betty talked and showed slides of various Apogons, versicolor, setosa, and others; Bill showed slides of some of his seedlings and other plants he was growing, Currier showed slides of Bill's garden and his own- mostly Siberians, but some Japanese as well; the speakers asked the listeners questions and the listeners asked the speakers. It was all very informative- it was also a lot of fun.

By noon or a little after, the projectors were all cooling off and the line was forming in the kitchen doorway for the goodies- cold meats and salads, Yankee-style baked beans and home-made breads, brownies and cookies and cakes and- do I remember a pie or two? And then Frank Warburton came forth with platters of his super corn-on-the-cob, plump juicy kernels of white and yellow mixed, torn from their parents not half an hour before, stripped from their husks and dropped into boiling water for just the right length of time.

Somewhere in there- either late in the program or early in the lunch- someone reported that it was raining and the Traveling Exhibit had to be rushed indoors. And a few hardy souls- husbands of female iris nuts, mostly, plus a few sons and daughters and maybe a grandchild or so- hustled the lawn chairs into the garage along with the supply of auction irises. By the time the last crumbs had been licked from the last set of fingers all was ready for the bidding to begin. We trooped out between the raindrops and started throwing our money around. Soda-pop for the young (who don't seem to mind the cold as much) and an urn of hot coffee for the rest, had been set out in one corner, and if the start was a bit chilly, we soon warmed up enough to enliven the bidding. Most of the stock was Siberian, some fairly old, some too new to be found in the catalogs- a couple of things will first be mentioned in print when the 1975 Registration List comes out; there were also quite a few Japanese irises, not all of which were present in the -flesh?- but were represented by envelopes containing postcards to be mailed to the grower who would ship to the winning bidder in due time, and several Apogon species were also included. By four o'clock all was over and the Auction

clerks were preparing the tallies while the rest of us filled out our checkbooks all but the price. At this point I would like to pay a special compliment to Bobbie Whitehouse and her daughter Wendy Shaw who have been doing this necessary but not exactly fascinating job for a few years now-our new Secretary, Ethel Shepherd, worked with Bobby for some years till Wendy was injected with a dollop of iris enthusiasm and got roped in, and how we could run an auction without these hard-working gals for the last six or seven years I dono!

Most of those present came from Eastern and Central Massachusetts; but we had our regular complement of tourists from Maine, western New York, Long Island, and New Jersey. The chance to buy Siberians at bargain prices (though considering the price of motels, you'd have to buy a whale of a lot at very low prices to break even!), to participate in good talk about irises- and particularly Siberians- and eat good food in good company attracts regulars from quite far afield, and there have been times when people have come from Ohio, Maryland, Virginia to join the fun. You people in the rest of the country just don't know what you've been missing. Maybe next year?

Back Talk by Peg

I sure can't brag about my irises this year nor about my jillions of seeds. Less than a third of the irises bloomed- something has been done about that, however- and from all my crosses I wound up with a grand total of one pod ripened and harvested. I didn't even have seedpods on anything except the white tectorum which, bless their little golden hearts, don't seem to be bothered by weather and just love shade. Their seeds have been sent off to the Seed Exchange. (Hint!)

On July 2 we had a crew of treemen come in and remove two oak trees from the back yard. Both were over 50 feet tall and the larger had a girth of over 6 feet. Since our neighbors on both sides have trees of similar size, you can imagine how much sunlight our iris bed had been getting. Now it is back in the sun again and I can hope for good bloom- at least till the neighbors' trees meet in the middle of our yard! I waited patiently till early August and then began the job of remaking the whole bed. Turned out there was one plant in it that could not be removed without killing it; not an iris but my precious Yucca louisianensis which has proven to be hardy here but after 10 years hasn't bloomed yet. The roots apparently go to China though the top is only about 15" high and 30" wide. There were quite a few gaps most of which have been filled by nice new irises- all Medians and Siberians- but I do have room to add a few more next year.

I haven't been this excited about the prospects for spring in years! But right at the moment most of them are half-drowned in weeds, because as soon as I took my hands off the irises, Himself went to work on the sad,

bare area where our nice shady lawn died of sunstroke. For four weeks I couldn't approach the iris bed, but everything was well watered along with the new sunny-lawn grass so the weeds had a lovely time. Must say the irises did too; the-parts of the bed that I've cleared so far in the time available between rain and devotion to the typewriter preparing this issue show fine vigorous new growth on all plants. Anyhow, I can hardly wait.

Just a little reminder- we have back issues of many though not all TSI available at \$1 for Volume 1, # 1,2,3,4,7,8 and Vol. 2 # 3, 5, 6, 9, 10; at \$1.50 All of Vol. 3 and Vol. 4 # 1 (ten numbers make a volume.) We also have copies of the Handbook of Judging Standards at \$1. If you have gaps in your file, now's the chance. Some of the earlier issues are reduced to one or two copies so they are on a first-come, first-served, and the slowpokes can wait in the cold, basis.

Now can I make a small prayer to all of you: PLEASE, could you find the time this fall or early winter to jot down a few words- half a page, maybe, more if you feel inspired, about your Siberian planting, Siberians you saw this year, troubles you have with the Siberians, crosses you are thinking of making- anything that has to do with the Siberians! -And then send it to me before March 1? PLEASE?? The spring issue somehow doesn't seem to inspire anyone to write nice long articles, and for most of my incumbency as Editor I have wound up writing anywhere from a third to three-quarters of the issue. I am pooped, chilluns. I have run out of ideas. If I find myself next March first with just enough material for three pages, three pages are what you will get; and maybe we will have to take the bit in the teeth or the bull by the horns, or something, and go to one annual publication. I would hate to see that happen and I'm sure you would too. But we just can't go on like this.

So think about it. And then do something.

My thanks this issue go to Betty Wood and Marlene Ahlburg who so nobly took pictures. Betty sent pictures of the auction but unfortunately they just came today so we will save them for spring (to be exact they came about 15 minutes ago just about as I typed 'I am pooped' and even to get in another picture I couldn't make myself retype this page.

The Check List should get to the printer sometime this winter and I hope to be able, in the Spring 1976 issue, to be able to set a prize for it after which you can all deluge me with orders. (Of course it would be very helpful if we had some idea of how large a printing order to put in.) In one way I'm sad about this; I had hoped to have it available by now; but in another way, it means we will be able to cover the Siberians through the 1974 registrations and introductions, which is just that much better than ending with the 1973 ones. I know that those who do get it will find it useful.

Have a good winter and a nice spring-

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