



THE SIBERIAN IRIS

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PRESIDENT'S PAGE

D. Steve Varner

As your President in 1980-81-82, I send you both warm greetings and fond goodbyes. The friendships I've had in this term have enriched my life. This will be my last message from the President's Page.

I extend my thanks to all of you who have supported me and so faithfully carried on the work of SSI. At this writing, I do not have the report of the nominating committee. As Vice-President, Harry Kuesel should follow me as President. I request your continued support for Harry and the incoming slate of officers and directors.

As of December 31, 1982, by this message, I am canceling appointments of all chairmen of committees who are now serving you, so that Harry can choose his own chairmen for his "team" for his term.

Our book, *The Siberian Iris*, has been received enthusiastically and has been selling well. It is available by mail from Julius Wadekamper, 10078 154th Ave., Elk River, MN 55339 at \$7.00 per copy, postpaid. We have paid \$2,000 on our note to the AIS Foundation for the loan to help us publish this book.

The Siberian Section meeting at Denver was well attended, considering other meetings being held concurrently. Not enough officers and directors were present at our official board meeting for a quorum to conduct business. No nominations were received for our Distinguished Service Award this year. Our committee to select the form for this award has not come up with the finished product, and I apologize to our first two recipients, Peg Edwards and Charlotte Withers.

I was encouraged by the continuing increased interest in Siberians, both here and abroad. Most gardens at the 1985 AIS Convention at Indianapolis are going all out to grow your guests well, and we should have a good display of Siberians there. Seven host gardens have the beds prepared to receive the guests now and they will be planted in the sites where they are to bloom in '85. An eight garden is already full. Shirley (Mrs. Russ) Bruno, of Merysville, IN, is Chairman of the Committee for Guest Irises for the convention.

CONGRATULATIONS to Harley Briscoe on his winning the 1982 Morgan Award for STEVE VARNER! It is my big frustration that we have not been able to persuade AIS to change the status of awards to equalize Award of Merits for Siberians and other Sections. The absolute inactivity of our Robins is another problem. If any of you are holding one of the robins, please get it right off to me, for we have had a Robin Chairman who has not been functioning. And plan now to attend the 1983 AIS Convention in Boston. Siberian bloom should be great!

Again, THANKS! I extend fond greetings to you all and look forward to spending more time in hybridizing in the future.

THE CLOUDED IRIS BULLEYANA

B. Leroy Davidson

There is a fine clump of irises in the Siberian planting of the Denver Botanic Garden, received there as authenticated *I. bulleyana*, and when in the course of discussion during the 1982 meetings it was disputed as representative of that taxon some eyebrows were raised. As will be explained here, confusion has always ridden with the name, and in fact there may actually be no such species in the wild, per se, whatever it is supposed to be.

In any case, the name was given us by Dykes in 1910 at the same time he described its yellow counterpart as *I. forrestii* and we must try to deal with it or else forget it. In view of what he was to observe subsequently of its behavior we get the idea that he may have been overstepping his usual caution in having named it. In the original description published in Gardeners Chronicle for 25 June 1910 he wrote that it "supplies the link between *I. sibirica* and *I. clarkei*, for it has the hollow stem of *sibirica* although in foliage and growth it is very similar to *clarkei*...the standards...blue-purple and the falls mottled the same color on a creamy ground."

After further consideration he noted in The Garden for 23 June 1921 that "*bulleyana* seems to be of hybrid origin as it does not breed true from seed. Its parents however are unknown and there is no suggestion as to which species could have given rise to it." In the same publication for 18 July 1925 he furthered this idea with the declaration "Variation among its seedlings casts some doubt on its claim to specific rank; it grows to about two feet with somewhat narrow leaves and flowers veined and blotched with blue on a white ground." In his Handbook of Irises of 1924 he had observed that some of the seedlings closely resembled *I. forrestii* but that the seed vessel was quite distinct, while of that species he noted that it was advisable to select those of "clear yellow and not the veined forms which sometimes occur."

Also flowering at Denver, these in the new rock garden section of the botanic garden, were two similar plants, so much alike they might have all three come from a common pod; the latter two had been raised there from separate seed lots, one having come in as *I. kumaonensis* (which it assuredly was not) and the other gathered in Czechoslovakia as *I. sibirica*. These three were further significant in that they bore some resemblance to the old garden cultivar GRANDIS, yet not quite so flutteringly charming. The illustration in AIS Bulletin 166, p. 17 for July 1962 is a good likeness of this trio.

Now back to the beginning: Dykes honored A. K. Bulley in naming the plant. The description was based on material from Bulley's garden, grown from seed (according to the record) sent from western China by George Forrest. When much later Dykes had opportunity to question Forrest

as to details of this origin, Forrest recalled seeing no such plant nor did his field notes refresh his memory. He understandably made no waves about the matter as he was still in Bulley's employ. It is of course entirely possible for that particular seed lot to have been gathered by one of his many native collectors, and in fact the sequence of the lot numbers indicates that the site of the collection must have been very near to that of the one named for Forrest, # 6028. As Brian Mathew has pointed out (*The Iris*, 1981) there was insufficient time interval between Bulley's receipt of the seed and Dykes' receipt of the plant for a garden hybrid to have been conceived and raised, leaving the obvious alternative, that if the plant called *bulleyana* actually is of hybrid origin then it was due to the industry of Chinese bees. (This refutes Grey-Wilson's speculation of 1971.)

But to the point, the Denver plants are not that at all; though somewhat resembling in coloration the Rounds plate in Dykes' Genus *Iris*, the flower form is very different; it should be of rather loose and arched and drooping aspect, the standards open and the falls pendant as in others of the Subseries *Chrysographes*. Furthermore the seed capsules should be quite thin-walled and topped off with a beaklike projection resulting from the now-shriveled but persistent perianth-tube to which tattered remains of dried flower parts might still cling, as Rounds has painted them.

Four weeks following the Denver meetings, capsules of all three plants had quite filled; none had a beak and in fact all resembled those of other garden Siberians near to hand, blunt-topped with a scar where the floral parts dropped cleanly away when the flower had withered.

At this late date a plant of McEwen's BLUE FORTY was in its height of glory, too late to have been appreciated by the assembled irisarians, as well as too late for direct comparison with the supposed *bulleyana*, but its similarity to the Rounds plate was striking, the color a little paler. Furthermore, when the blossoms faded they were not shed but remained withered wisps attached to the beak at the top of the capsules just as Rounds saw them eighty years before. Dr. McEwen had grown this from seed obtained from a long succession of generations of seedlings raised in England by the late Doris Hansford as *Iris bulleyana* in an attempt to isolate a strain which would breed true to color. The records in the BIS Yearbooks tell us she was never able to complete this, that each generation gave some yellows, some mottled, and some blues, just as Dykes had observed. The same was true of the lot McEwen grew.

Iris bulleyana, its origin and its identity have been cloudy issues from the outset, a fact which had led Mrs. Hansford to her investigative breeding through six generations. The taxon has been argued in both thoughtful, constructive ways and otherwise, clear evidence of just how woe-begone it has become. Randolph wrote of it in the AIS Garden Irises that the well-known RED EMPEROR probably represented one color-form of

it, when that cultivar is very clearly of the *sibirica-sanguinea* persuasion, in plant, in color and in capsule. Mathew (1981) has conjectured that *I. bulleyana* arose from *I. chryso-graphes* and *I. forrestii*. This more realistic speculation does not account for the discrepancy of color, the big issue here. We have long known a garden strain apparently first grown by Amos Perry prior to 1924, of which a dozen selections were given catalog names. These tend strongly to yellowish-bronze, fawn, biscuit and amber and came from the mating of *I. forrestii* and *I. chryso-graphes*, called Chrysofor Hybrids or the Chrysofor Strain. Many of these have the look of cinnamon sprinkled on custard, and they find much favor.

There have been other observations of so-called 'blue *forrestii*'. Many iris species are known to occur in both blue and yellow-flowered forms and it would seem that is what we have here. In view of all this it would seem logical to accept such irises as BLUE FORTY as representative of *Iris bulleyana*, at least until such time as the Lichiang Ranges of Yunnan are available to plant explorers again. It might be quite correct and proper to think of *I. bulleyana* as the blue-flowered form of the (otherwise yellow) *I. forrestii*, or it might be just as acceptable to express it vice-versa. The rules of nomenclature maintained by the International Botanical Congress surely have taken such instances into the realm of probable occurrence and, therefore, they have undoubtedly provided the rule to cover. In this instance it is the issue of two described taxonomic species published at the same time which may actually represent color forms of a single biological species. For the record, the description of *I. forrestii* precedes that of *I. bulleyana* in *Gardeners' Chronicle*, 25 June 1910.

CORRECTION OF ERROR

In the spring issue, on p. 16, there was an error of typing in the wording of the proposed amendment. It should read 'All terms, including that of the President, shall be for three years' and continuing as given.

I can only say that my mind must have gone in a slightly different direction from my eye when I typed that bit - Peg.

POSTCARD - from Jean Erickson

NEWS! POLLY DODGE was awarded best specimen at the Redwood Iris Society Annual Show in Ukiah, Cal. on May 16, 1982. It was an absolutely perfect stalk which was exhibited by Jackie Norton of Windsor, Cal. and was selected by discerning judges over hundreds of Tall Bearded irises. Oh, there is joy today!

(Wish we got more of these - Peg.)

SIBERIAN REPEATERS

Bee Warburton

Currier McEwen has been putting forth what he has called 'Preferential Rebloomers' for some time. He has discussed this under 'Time of Bloom' on page 10 of his delightful booklet, *Siberian Irises*. Currier now thinks it would be more appropriate to call this 'Repeat Bloom' since the Reblooming Society has defined rebloom as, actually, another season of bloom, whereas the Siberian repeat usually succeeds the standard earlier bloom without a hiatus, on plants with this genetic trait. That is, when the first bloom is finishing up, the stalks of the second bloom are coming up rapidly, ready to furnish another round of bloom, and these are in general a foot or so taller than the earlier stalks and have better branching and flowers.

This year, not only Currier's introductions selected for this but also some unsuspected convention guests burst forth with this additional bloom, in some cases having only a single or a very few stalks, but in Ken Waite's good blue seedling, #WS72-1 (which we hope he is naming), enough to make a good garden showing. As I counted them on July 4, there were eight stalks and more coming. Currier's *SOFT BLUE*, a most pleasing landscape variety, produced 12 stalks, and *ON AND ON*, seventeen.

I was astonished to find among the seedling rows from 1979 a great many with repeat stalks. I believe that the cool and wet weather of June encouraged them, but as not everything managed it, and very few showed in the rows of named varieties, the trait must be present in the genes to show when circumstances are right. It is an excellent habit, doubling the bloom period, with the repeat show coming in late June and early July when it is most welcome. It is certainly worthy of being developed and exploited, in spite of the fact that it is bound to be a slow and difficult process for at least two good reasons...one, that it doesn't show until plants are well established and probably needs favorable conditions; and, two, that its inheritance comes from sibirica types with flowers that are unsophisticated by modern standards. Moreover, using repeat stalks for breeding entails the added problem of late-maturing pods interfering with digging for distribution or transporting.

Just the same, when I saw the extent of this second blooming, I spent all of July 4th noting it, and marking repeat stalks for pollinating. On my best one, *George Henry*, with 27 stalks, the seed set was fabulous. I can hardly regret it, though there must be enough seed to plant an acre of seedling rows, and it proved to be a most fertile pollen parent, besides. I hadn't kept much of this plant originally because, although the flowers are good enough, as white irises go, they just aren't up to the sophistication of such as *WING ON WING* and later *McGarvey* creations. I just couldn't resist naming it for our cat, *George Henry*, who just matches it in white and gold; and *George Henry* just matches the couch covers in my workroom, which I bought as 'dark

gold'. After all, cats are famous for 'coming back', and George did have a similar brother who was left at a farm on the southern shore of Long Island, and a few days later turned up at the door of his former owner in Port Jefferson, on the North Shore.

There are a few older named varieties with this trait, but the only one that bloomed in any quantity was FAIRY DAWN, which showed ten stalks. MY LOVE produced a few, WINE WINGS, two, and GRAND JUNCTION, one. To my amazement PERCHERON also produced a good showing, though no taller than the original (and lucky, that.) I couldn't resist crossing it with GEORGE HENRY of which it is a sibling from the cross of ATOLL X RUFFIEDVELVET.

I now have a vast quantity of pods from GEORGE HENRY crossed with various of Currier's repeaters (in particular, ON AND ON) and of PERCHERON X GEORGE HENRY...for a starter.

(2¢ worth: I have had this type of continued bloom on one of the relatively recent reds, and somewhere I have commented on it but where? That's flown out of my head. It was RUBY WINE or ROYAL ENSIGN or CLARET - they are all growing close together in my garden and sometimes I forget, in my armchair, which I was looking at when I noticed something odd. Some years, SUMMER SKY produces continuous bloom over a period of about 5 weeks - as the first few stalks start to open, a new batch comes up, grows a few inches taller, and by the time these are opening another few are rising through the clump another two or three inches. More about this in Back Talk later - Peg)

OUR BOOK - Currier's book, that is!

I received a note from Julius Wadepammer announcing that a mail-order house dealing exclusively with books on gardening has bought a supply of The Siberian Iris and has listed it in their catalog at a small reduction in price, so it will be getting into the hands of gardeners who perhaps do not even know our Society exists. They also offer Brian Mathew's book The Iris and Molly Price's book published quite a number of years ago. There are indeed books on almost every aspect of gardening at a modest reduction in price, including some that to my knowledge have been hard to find or even unavailable in this area for some years. There is a fee of 25¢ for the price list, but you may find in it something you have wanted or needed and been unable to obtain locally. If you are interested, the address is:

Capability's Books for Gardeners
Route 1, P.O. Box 114, Highway 46
Deer Park, Wisc. 54007

QUERY: Why is it that a plant will set bee pods on almost every flower, but every cross you make with it as pod parent just shrivels up and falls off without even making slight hopeful signs? Is it telling me it doesn't think well of my choice of parents?

A VISIT TO THE HOLLINGWORTH GARDEN

Jill Copeland and Anna Mae Miller

Bob and Judy Hollingworth live on about three acres of rolling land, with a pond, all well developed, with several large native trees, and added plantings by the owners. They have several raised beds edged with two or three railroad ties to give sufficient drainage for their Indiana clay. Before planting, the beds are treated with Methyl Bromide to kill the weed seeds and sterilize any bacterial or fungicidal residue from the previous iris planting. The rows are planted on a grid system, being planted three plants wide and the plants set equal distances apart, then a path, and the pattern repeated, the whole being mulched with wheat straw to hold water and control weeds. We arrived soon after a tornado warning had been lifted; instead there was a downpour. The pond was chocolate-colored the next morning.

Bob and Judy are very active in the garden; Bob plans and does most of the crosses while Judy helps with the care and feeding, as well as pointing to one now and then and saying "I'm crazy for that one". Bob and Judy came from Harrogate, the site of the Veterinary practice of James Herriot of 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' fame; they came to the U.S. for Bob to study in California for his Ph.D in Pesticides.

They plant their seeds in the fall indoors and grow in their attached greenhouse, shared with cacti, orchids and other exotics. The seeds that are treated with colchicine 0.05% in 'jelly jars' are planted in ProTrays, the way many tree seedlings are currently grown. In the spring these trays are moved outside the greenhouse under the patio which is atop the walk-out basement. We visited on May 29-30 and the 1981 crosses were eight to fifteen inches high and not yet planted out, but a bed was being treated and readied for them.

The plot, which grew irises the last few years, had been mowed last fall and then plowed with Bob's Gravelly, and the roots removed by Andrew and Michael, the young Hollingworths. Then it was tilled again in spring, followed by the methyl bromide treatment. The seedlings will be large clumps by next bloom season with several bloom stalks to each plant.

It was great fun to see some of the seedlings for the first time with the hybridizer and his helpmeet. Bob has a fitted plastic tackle box, which Judy carries. The kit consists of a small stapler, used to staple Dymo tape with the parentage around the ovary, stakes, pens, Twistems to tie blooms closed to prevent insect pollination, envelopes to collect pollen for later use and to take back to the microscope to check for tetraploidy, and many other articles - e.g. date stamp. (Judy wears a canvas 'nail apron' for her kit, that has printed on the front "To Hell With Aphids").

Each cross in the garden has a large stake with the parentage on it. All this information is mapped in the record book.

We were able to see, naturally illustrated, some of the simpler Mendelian genetics of Siberian irises. Red X White gives blue, because the enzyme which causes the red pigment to go on to the blue is missing in the red, and the enzyme which causes pigment to go to the white form is missing in the white. When the two are crossed some of each pigment is present in all the offspring so they are all blue. When these blue plants are crossed they give a ratio of 1:1:2 in which one plant is missing the first enzyme and is therefore white, and the other is missing the second enzyme and is therefore red, while two have some of both and therefore are blue. The pinks act like light reds, that is, a Pink X White gives blues.

FAIRY DAWN-type has a different type of genetic heritage so that whatever color you cross it with, this other color is what you get in the seedlings. It is a true genetic recessive, in its color. (ANNIVERSARY x POLLY DODGE) X (POLLY DODGE x WHITE SWIRL) should give the 1:1:2 ratio of the second generation from red X white, and so it does, but the whites from this cross have a lot of yellow in them. We also learned that red x red gives all red, while pink x pink gives pink or red or both; blue with red in its background gives 50/50 red and blue with no red in its background x red or white gives blue. Surprising?

(Anna Mae wrote that she showed the article to Bob to read and he returned it saying there was a minor correction he'd like made but he never sent it to her. Come across, Bob, I'm on tenterhooks to know what was 'not quite right' somewhere in this! - Peg)

MISMASH - Small Items on Various Subjects

Julius Wadekamper sent on to me a note from one of his customers in El Paso, Tex., which he thought might be of some interest:

"Just a few lines to let you know that all the Siberian Irises you sent us last fall are doing just wonderfully. Two bloomed this spring; they usually don't bloom the first year. The old established clumps that I brought from Chicago were just full of blooms. Some say they don't do well here in the extreme south. I must disagree as they sure proved it this spring. We also have some Japanese Irises that will bloom in about another month.

(signed) Henry"

Julius sent this to me just as the Siberians were beginning to bloom at his garden in Minnesota.

Currier in a letter to me mentioned that some of the seedlings that bloomed for the first time were the best ever for him. Hope we'll be able to read about them come spring.

STYLE ARMS, HAFT AND SIGNALS

Bee Warburton

We are fortunate that the shape of Siberian flowers usually permits the style arms to be visible, since they may actually be the most beautiful parts of the flower, with iridescent, pearly, violet or aqua shadings. They are beautiful in themselves, either matching or contrasting with the petal colors. These have been well noted, but little comment has been made about their crests, which may be curled or crinkled so as to look like little florets. As they are now, they are a charming adornment, but it is for sure that they could be grossly exaggerated and probably multiplied into petaloids like those of the fanciest Japanese irises. In some of these florets the stigmas are already so reduced into tiny triangles that they apparently have difficulty in accepting pollen...at least, many refused all that I crossed on them, and did not set any to natural pollination. And yes, I tried...the temptation was too much for me...and I DID get some seed.

The shape and position of the style arms have an important influence on the overall effect of the flower...the shape because if it is wide enough for its entire length, it will mask the entire haft signal area, unless it is in a raised position. It will conceal the patterning entirely if it is wide enough and also lies down close to the haft. It seems to me that the haft and signal area are best so covered unless they are such that they enhance the beauty of the flower, and a number of patterns may do this, for instance: in signals, bright golden semi-circular blazes that actually look metallic in the sunlight; or if they are clean enough, white semi-circular blazes. Those I dislike have indiscriminate brown, black or yellowish mixtures, and these need to be covered by wide style arms curving over them.

The signal patches begin where the middle part of the haft markings ends. This central portion of the fall haft is often of various shades of green, some of which look elegant against the vivid dark blues or purples of the fall, as they expand into a width forming a double semi-circle. If the styles are well above this, and there are no conspicuous signal patches, they may form an adornment at the shoulders, beautiful on the darker petal colors. An uncommon display at this point is a solid darker flash, paling down to the end of the fall, or at times curving down to the edge and around the end of the fall, leaving a lighter center. For years I struggled without success to pale this fall center out to a white circle, but anyway it is handsome in the lighter blue, with or without the restrained dappling as in ATOLL.

So it is that in Siberian irises, parts of their flowers, despised in other irises, are capable of a very special beauty all their own, contributing to the overall loveliness of this manifestation of our favorite flower.

(Isn't it nice to have two articles from Bee in the same issue!)

PLANTING TIMES
Jennifer Hewitt

Until recently it has been usual in Britain to recommend planting Siberians in autumn, preferably in September while the soil is still warm, and this has generally been satisfactory in that most plants settle in well though flowering the following year cannot be relied upon. Then spring planting was tried and this seems to give good, or better, results although, again, a season's bloom is usually lost. However, we have been trying a third alternative which, with care, seems to suit the plants best of all and to allow us to have bloom every year. (There is also the "move half the clump one year and the other half the next" school of thought, which is fine if you have the space.) If the Siberians are moved immediately after blooming, which for us means early to mid-July, and are very thoroughly watered in and kept moist until they are growing strongly, they seem more vigorous the next year and bloom is excellent. There is a snag for breeders in that seed cannot be set on plants which are to be moved, and it is possible that this method would not be suitable for areas which are very dry in midsummer, even with irrigation, but this time can be thoroughly recommended if conditions are suitable; this is the experience over several seasons of several growers in different parts of the country. Siberians I have examined at various times of the year seem to me to make relatively little root growth in spring; leaves and buds are produced from rhizomes initiated the previous year and it is immediately after flowering that the plants grow most actively both above and below ground, and the new increases develop while the bloomed-out rhizomes die. In my garden the tetraploid varieties grow more vigorously than diploids before blooming but this does not seem to make any difference and they seem to move as well as diploids. Given sufficient moisture, the new roots which are being produced in quantity very quickly take hold, the plants (even those sent from one garden to another) suffer little shock, and we have had few, if any, of the losses suffered after moving plants in autumn when too much rain, or frost, can make life very difficult for them.

(In a later letter Jennifer sent two particularly interesting bits of information:

(Most interesting flower I've heard of and seen a photograph of is a reverse amoena from SUMMER SKY seed. Do you remember writing in the Fall 1977 TSI that the potential of S.S. hadn't been explored? This plant was grown by Dr. Marion Wood who had the seed from the B.I.S. Seed Exchange. White style arms, white falls with a pale blue flush, yellow hafts, and blue standards - my description from a color print she has lent me. Poor shape, but this was its first flowering. Very Exciting! Have you heard of others with this pattern?)

(In the course of Currier's trip to Florence, Geneva and England in May I had the pleasure of welcoming him here to look at the Siberians in my garden. His comments were very inspiring even though few were out; then I was able to hear his comments as he judged the classes for beardless irises at the Carrington Iris Festival - our once-in-three years version of your AIS Conventions. His comments opened my eyes some more as to what to look for in good Siberians among others. Later he gave us a stunning slide show with commentary on his breeding work and latest introductions, which opened a lot of eyes! We are getting a lot more interest in Siberians and in trends in hybridizing and this program caused a lot of talk.)

Back Talk

Peg Edwards

I have no intention of apologizing for the brevity of this issue. I have said before, if you don't write I can't print, and while occasionally I can stretch things by writing an article myself, I do run out of ideas or find myself stuck with some other slab of work I couldn't avoid. Both reasons are involved this time; three more babies arrived in our family this year and as my nieces have this delusion that a new baby without a knitted or crocheted layette from Aunt Peg is hardly to be considered to be properly equipped to face life, I have been hard at it right through the spring and summer - and I'm a very slow worker. Ten days with a pulled muscle in my back that would let me neither sit nor stand didn't precisely speed things either. And as for thinking something up to write about - which I usually do about a month before time to start typing - nothing at all came into my head even while I was trying to get to sleep at night (which is when my brain reaches maximum strength, which is why I have insomnia.)

So we are getting just 16 pages this time, I do have some things promised for the Spring issue and hope they will arrive in time. Which reminds me. Deadlines. They appear always at the bottom of page 1 - or in this case, since the Index will be rather short, about the middle of the page. I really do appreciate it when articles arrive a few days early so that if I think there is a need to make a few, or even one, major change, I can write to ask the writer if they will be permissible to him or her. (Gosh, don't we need a singular form of 'them' which applies to either sex! 'Him or her' is clumsy.) I would also appreciate some nice clear contrasty black-and-white pictures, or even a color print in which it would be possible to see that, in b-&-w, it would still be possible to tell the greens from the blues, but this doesn't happen often and unless the printer and I can be sure of this it is silly to try to print such a picture.

I do apologize, however, if the issue comes about two weeks late.

That is the combined result of my getting involved in something else that took more time than expected and consequently delayed typing TSI about 10 days. It couldn't be postponed, and I didn't set the deadline for starting. Primary Elections in the middle of it all didn't exactly help, either (Election Board work is sacred; I get paid for it!) So we are late this time, and I suppose it should be classed as my own fault. Why did I accept the job in the first place?

Truth is, I'm a sucker.

I was very interested in the report from Jennifer Hewitt on the SUMMER SKY seedling that is a reverse amoena. I have said many times that this cultivar needs investigation, and I have made several attempts at crossing it. I had hoped to be able to report a nice assortment of seed pods from crosses I made this year; but not one of them took. As a matter of fact I made about 40 crosses of one kind or another - Siberians, SDBs, Daylilies, Lilies - and do not have a single seedpod to show for it. Blame it on the weather, perhaps - it was fairly awful. June was rather chilly, July mostly hot, August cool and wet, September was cool and dry with a few nights when temperatures dropped into the low 50s and even, one night, the high forties (I know what it is about four or five AM as that's when Timmy our mad cat finishes his night's sleep and wants out, and who gets the job of crawling out of bed and opening the door for him? Me. He has to be desperate, or I have to be in a coma, for him to try waking Harry; so while I'm up I check the thermometer.) And now the weather boys tell us we are going to have a cold winter. I wish we could stop having all this weather and get back to having our nice Long Island climate again.

And we really do have a climate all our own; I've had English-born neighbors who said it was very like southern England - till they lived through one of our northeasters or a hurricane. We can grow things that otherwise will not survive north of Maryland; we can also grow things that pine away and die if they are tried south of New Jersey (I am speaking of areas within, say, 100 miles of the sea.) In summer it can be as pleasant as the coast of Maine - or it can be as fiery as anything in the tropics. How many places can grow Rhododendrons 20 feet tall and Crepe Myrtles in the same garden? It can be done here, quite easily, if you can last till the Rhodies have grown that tall (mine are only about six feet so far - and they ain't a-going no taller!) The whole place is a glacial deposit - rock, gravel, coarse sand and silver beaches.

We aren't the only place where weather was bad this year, though. Steve Varner, in a note tucked in with the President's Page, said his iris seed from this year's crosses was very small, though he got a lot from his tetra Hems and his Peony crosses. He's better off than me, with my collection of Zero Pods. Oh well, I did get seeds from my nicest Gazania, and two plants of it that look as though they might come through the winter - indoor potted plants that flowered in the garden all summer till I dug them on Labor Day (the traditional day here for taking in the

house plants, but I don't take whole plants as a rule - I root cuttings from the ones planted out, and only take in the ones in hanging baskets or sitting on the terrace in the shade.) I got very interested in the Gazanias when we were in California a few years ago - we were there in late March and they were just coming into bloom; they told me they are perennial in most of the L.A. area. I had grown them, but only as annuals, and what pretty things they are. So the flowers are only out when the sun shines - Portulaca does the same, and almost everyone grows it here - plant it once and it comes up again practically forever. I tried once to cross it with Purslane in hopes of getting something with the lovely flowers and the interesting spoon-shaped leaves, but of course I got nothing at all. Not even a weed!

After a walk around the yard to clear my head somewhat - typing sort of numbs my mind; is it the sound of the keys hitting the roller, or the tiny concussions of fingers against keys? - I feel a bit more awake and ready to think a little again. The autumn crocus are out - at least the early ones; others will be along in a couple of weeks, of other species. Sternbergia is also blooming. That is a bit funny; I once, many years ago, planted three bulbs of it, all of which bloomed the first year. The second year only two bloomed, the third year only one, which went on blooming for another couple of years. Then for quite a long time, I had no flowers in the fall, but the leaves came up faithfully every spring and even, in time, increased. Three years ago it bloomed again - finally! and this year it has two blooms, and I suspect that the bulb divided somewhere along the way and the new bulb has finally matured to the point of starting to bloom. I'm not digging it up to find out, though; I know when to let well enough alone. Why they call it Autumn Daffodil I don't know, as it only resembles a daff in the bright yellow color, while the flower shape is much more like a crocus or colchicum. It is a plant worth having if you can persuade it to grow, which I suspect means a fairly deep loamy soil and dry conditions in summer. Dry I can supply but not deep loam, unfortunately for me.

What do you do when, every year, you lose the lower layers of top-soil to the water table a dozen feet under your feet? I can't dig up everything and lay plastic sheeting under the whole place, nor replace the losses from below with a couple of inches of fresh soil all over the garden. Some things like shallow ground - azaleas, for example, never seem to send their roots more than about 10 inches down, and here they really flourish; ditto rhodies, Pieris, heaths and heathers. Most of the spring bulbs - and their fall relatives - seem to like us too, and most annuals. Daylilies don't seem to care very much what soil they have - give them eight or ten inches of something more than pure sand and they make clumps that we (both of us working together) have to divide at least every five years - maybe we don't get the biggest flowers possible, but we got lots of them and they aren't puny at all - and the same is true of all the Hosta varieties I've grown.

Minature roses are happy, but not the big ones, except for one plant of a red floribuda - I think it is Pinnocchio, or is that the one I mean? I'm not very good on roses any more - which I grew from a cutting and which has been growing and blooming for more than 20 years in the same place with very little attention other than a semiannual cutting-back and a dollop of fertilizer every spring. Trees - we have a 50 ft. tulip tree which is almost as wide as it is high, and shades us from the hot summer very effectively; we have five dogwoods, none nursery-grown and all luxurious, and the only mountain ash in the neighborhood that is more than 20 years old, as all the others planted when ours was, have fallen to some sort of blight which will probably hit the younger ones too - but ours just ignores it. And of course the irises. I don't say they wouldn't like it better if they had more root room under their feet, but they do manage to live and bloom fairly well. Mums don't give a hoot; pull up a whole clump some spring - just yank it out - and see how deep their roots are; not very. Mine get yanked every spring when the shoots are about 6" tall, then I make cuttings and disbud them and have fine flowers, though I'm apt to be otherwise engaged when I should be pinching out or disbudding them. The elegant ones are just not hardy here, and in fall I'm too busy with the cleanup to shift them to the cold frame, so I don't even try to grow them any more. Wish I could!

Oh well, there is no such thing as an absolutely perfect climate for a gardener who wants to grow everything - but in the very best varieties. I have reached the age when I have learned to accept my limitations and sort of work around them. They tell me you can also get very tired of banging your head against a stone wall, and settle for hiring a bulldozer. The cases are really quite similar; You get tired of headaches.

Live through the horrid winter they are threatening us with; eventually spring will be back again. Keep looking forward -

Pe q