

THE NEWSLETTER of
THE SIBERIAN, SPURIA and JAPANESE IRIS GROUP
of the British Iris Society

No, 3

July 1978

EDITORIAL

Although many people will have cause to complain about their dismal and wet holidays, the Siberica, Spuria and Japanese Iris have certainly benefited from the rain. I have Iris laevigata in the pond, and it has flowered beautifully for the past month. The Kaempferi are just coming into bud, I really do love these Water Iris, and wish we could see more of them.

Last week I went up to see Mr, Vic Humphrey's Nursery at Arnold. What a splendid sight it was to see his SPURIAS standing straight and erect after the heavy rain, showing no sign of damage at all. Perhaps I could try to give you a mental picture of some of them. I do hope we will soon be seeing them grown more and more, as they become better known.

Spuria DAWN CANDLE caught my eye, it is very beautiful, a large ruffled yellow and white iris, a real 'joy to behold'. Trevor Nottle also grows this, in Australia.

S. BELISE - mauvy blue, not quite as large and shorter, but with delightfully veined white falls.

I think you could call the colour of S. RED STEP maroon toning to brown, a most arresting colour.

S. PHOTEGÉ is pale blue with stripes of yellow and white on the falls, very delicate.

Another lovely SPURIA is LORD WOLSEY, very dark violet, with cream falls, violet veined.

S. SUNLIT SEA is very aptly named. Standards pale blue, falls with yellow veining.

What a very good name to give a deep yellow SPURIA: GOOD NATURE. I wonder if it is because it grows well, or because yellow is a sunny good-natured colour.

S. WHITE HERON is very large with a charming touch of yellow on the falls. WAKE ROBIN is another white SPURIA with wide ruffled petals, as also is LYDIA JANE, a warmer white with yellow spots on the falls.

S, SUSPENSE and ESSAY are both deep violet purple, with lovely gold veining on the falls, but the falls of SUSPENSE are slightly larger.

Now I hope that I have whetted your appetite, and that you will be writing in to say if you are growing any of these SPURIAS. I do hope so, because they really are good iris to grow in your border, or maybe in an island bed, or even in your allotment.

Good gardening for the remainder of 1978, we certainly could do with some better weather.

Joan Trevithlck.

SETTING STANDARDS FOR ARRANGING IRISES

The standard of flower arrangement over the years has so greatly improved that the article I wrote on the subject for the B.I.S Year Book in 1968 seems less necessary now, ten years later, when there are so many Flower Clubs with this in mind to consider it.

However the general quality of all the arrangements, in the specialists' shows such as our own, is still too often well below the standards of the N.A.F.A.S. (National Association of Flower Arrangement Societies), and a few extracts from the article written so long ago may be useful to those who do not belong to it or actively support it, and who only show their skill at the Iris Show.

Iris do need special care in their arrangement, and balance of design should be of great importance both with their flowers and the accompanying foliage, to obtain the most pleasing results. One necessary care is to find buds for the top and sides of the design that will not open before the show judges see it. This is often quite difficult because the buds of irises unfurl very quickly, and many a good design has been spoilt by having all the flowers out together, giving a top-heavy look. The largest flowers should be placed at the base and some should be recessed to give depth to the whole plan. Often, too, an arrangement is marred by flatness of the material, and care should be used so that all flowers should be seen to the greatest advantage and at different levels.

My personal view is that foliage other than that of the iris, which is always so complimentary to the flowers, should be strictly limited to filling the small gaps to hide stems at the base. They should be small and spiky, like lavender or rosemary. Ornamental grey foliage is often rather too decorative and takes the eye away from the beauty of our favourite flowers.

The Japanese have used irises in their restrained and devotional way for hundreds of years, and the care taken has been inbred by them in their use of flowers and other materials for their strictly religious observances.

The smaller types of irises, the dwarf bearded, the Siberians and the Californians make the best subjects for places taking space of about two feet, but the TBs are delightful in pedestals or for larger areas,

Those who grow *I. lortettii* and other oncocyclus types think that these Eastern beauties are the most elegant of all. They look as out of place in the green show vases as the Crown Jewels would look in a laundry basket. They need a small dark stone or alabaster urn container with a velvet base, or if one is so fortunate as to possess it, an onyx inkwell for which there is no further use. Just one flower alone with two attendant leaves, placed where the ink once was, and stood on the desk, would be an incentive to the most sluggish to write good prose. Alas, I do not have an onyx inkwell!

Doris Hansford Morris.

A NEW MEMBER IN AUSTRALIA

The following extracts are taken from a letter received by Mrs, Hansford Morris. Trevor J. Nottle lives at 43 Tingira Drive, Q'Sullivan's Beach, South Australia 5166, and wrote to say he would be interested to join the Group. He can only grow Spurias because the climate is so hot and dry. Siberians generally die after a year or two.

He has done some hybridising among his Spurias and has sent seed to the American Spuria Iris Society. In Australia, hybrids are very difficult to obtain because the only two commercial growers and importers live in Sidney where the weather is against survival. Bob Raabe has three plants left out of 120 species and varieties, and Gordon Loveridge lost every one of his imports. He is soon retiring to live in the Blue Mountains where he will probably concentrate on Siberians and Japanese among the Apogons, Trevor thinks,

Trevor has CAPRI GIRL, VIOLET VEIL, RUSSET FLAME, DAWN CANDLE and JACQUINOT BAY plus ochroleuca, monnieri, spuria and a lovely dark blue form of unknown name. He also has seedlings from Imperial Ruby, Imperial Bronze, Arbitrator, Intensity and Archie Owen all of which have yet to flower. He is hoping to use these for breeding.

In joining the Group, Trevor hopes to be able to obtain seed (see the list later in this issue, Trevor) and would also like to correspond with other Group members. Can anyone help him in this way? If so, please write direct to him.

REPORT ON THE SIBERICA, SPURIA and JAPANESE IRIS IN THE SHOW, 13th-14th JUNE.

This is only the second time I have been able to attend the Iris Show, and after an eventful journey, in which we got rather tangled up in the traffic involved in the visit of the Rumanian President, I was pleased to see so many species Iris entered in the different classes,

The Species Group stand was really outstanding, so many different Iris that I just had to make a list for those people of our different Groups who are unable to attend the Show. *Ii. douglasiana*, *filifolia*, *variegata*, *rudskyi*, *sintensii*, *graminea pseudocyperus*, *tectorum*, *tectorum alba*, *confusa*, *milesii*, *versicolor kermesina*, Holden Clough, *shrevei.*, *speculatrix*, a spuria

collected in the Fens, sanguinea(white form), tricuspa, setosa, delavayi, chrysographes, wilsonii, chrysographes x forrestii, forrestii, Mirza Citronella, pseudacorus alba, Gerald Darby, japonica variegata, pallida variegata aurea, pseudacorus variegata and Sisyrinchium variegatum. As you can see this is a long list of the various species and I was unable to complete it, because so many people were interested in the stand. Our sincere congratulations to the Species Group.

It was not easy to separate the Siberian, Spuria and Japanese Iris as my time was so limited, so I hope you will forgive me if I miss any and accept our hearty congratulations on your success.

Class 19 - First prize to Sidney Linnegar with a new seedling, I. versicolor x pseudacorus, raised by Dr. J. Ellis - really outstanding. And second prize to Jennifer Hewitt for a seedling Siberian, medium blue self, which she told me could be from Tycoon.

In the classes for Siberica hybrids I noticed SHOWDOWN, DEWFUL, MOUNTAIN LAKE and WHITE SWIRL in the winning entries and CAMBRIDGE, BLUE CAPE, NOTTINGHAM LACE and VIOLET MERE getting a second prize. DEWFUL was particularly good. An exhibit of I. graminea pseudocyperus, chrysographes, versicolor, pseudacorus and shrevei got a second place in one of the species classes, but special congratulations to Mrs. Goodwin for winning the Donald Patton Trophy with a delightful collection of Ii. delavayi, halophila, graminea, fulva and versicolor kermesina. Mrs. Goodwin was the only entrant in Class 34 for Spuria hybrids and one spike had not opened a flower, but the two yellow flowers which were out gained her a second prize and were very beautiful. Another success for her came in Class 37 (Hybrids between two different sections) where she won first prize for HOLDEN CLOUGH. This iris, a cross between pseudacorus and chrysographes which was introduced by the late Donald Patton, certainly is a beauty and did well for Group members as Brian McCarthy got third prize in this class with it, too. A lovely spike of GERALD DARBY got 2nd prize, shown by Mr. Minney.

The Christie Miller Cup went to Mr. W.F. Worth with a wonderful exhibit of Ii. pallida variegata argentea, kerneriana, tectorum, versicolor kermesina, cengaltii (a new name to me), foetidissima, laevigata, pseudacorus alba, shrevei, douglasiana, graminea var. pseudocyperus - a marvellous collection, I would love to see his garden.

The winner of the William Herbert Bowl showed several spurias, I. halophila, two spuria seedlings and also I. sanguinea and the controversial I. rudskyi, which I would venture to describe as having brownish yellow standards, zebra striped purple falls and a good yellow beard. This was an outstanding exhibit. And spurias featured in the award given for the best exhibit in the Decorative Classes. Sidney Linnegar's arrangement in the class entitled "Summer Glade" won him the "Flora" Award and his spurias were lovely.

Before closing I would like to stress that I have concentrated mainly on awards gained by S S & J Group members. There will be fuller reports in other bulletins and the Year Book.

One word more, on the display put on by Mr. Vic Humphrey which deservedly won him the Randall Trophy. On his stand he had, Sibericae VIOLET MERE, WISLEY WHITE, NOTTIHGHM LACE, WHITE SWIRL, WHITE QUEEN, CAMBRIDGE, ANNIVERSARY, PURPLE MERE and one outstanding and beautiful Siberica, DREAMING YELLOW. This was sent to him as a present from Dr. Currier McEwen of Maine, U.S.A. Grown from seed sent out by Mrs. Marjorie Brummitt, perhaps we could call it "Lend Lease" or "Lease Lend". Whichever it is, the results are very good indeed, and I hope it is here to stay.

Joan Trevithick.

SMALL SIBERIANS

(This article is reprinted from "The Siberian Iris" by kind permission of the Editor. It first appeared in March 1964 and was reprinted in the Spring 1978 issue, when the last paragraph was added.)

There seems to be quite a little interest in dwarf form of Siberians. I know of two people who are working on their breeding, and I've been thinking about it myself. I have no doubt that there are others. Maybe, for the benefit of those actually working for them, and also for anyone who might turn up a couple in a batch of seedlings, we should come to some sort of agreement on what should be considered a dwarf.

I'm sure nobody would want the term "dwarf Siberian" or "miniature Siberian" to be attached to something with a 4" flower on a 10" stem; this would be badly out of proportion. And a flower of suitably small size on a 20" stem would be equally unsatisfactory. From the few I have seen in bloom there is quite a range of sizes that could properly be called dwarfs, and I offer as a suggestion and a basis for discussion the following:

That a dwarf Siberian should be between 8" and 18" in height (in normal growth) and that the flower on such a plant should be in scale with the plant and not exceeding 2½" in width. That flower shape, branching, foliage and floriferousness be consistent with the lower height of the plant and the resulting difference in angle of vision; that is to say, a flower form best seen in profile would not be satisfactory on a plant so low that it is seen from above; on the shorter plants one branch would be the maximum if bunchiness is to be avoided, though on the taller end of the range two branches might be effective; foliage should be short and rather stiffly erect so that in looking down at the plant one would not get a background of a lot of sprawly leaves just below the flower - or even worse, above them; and while more stems per clump would be desirable this should not be carried to the point that the individual flower is lost in a mass of petals.

Opinions, please?

In connection with this I would like to talk a bit about possible lines of breeding. Among the standard-sized varieties there are a number which have flowers almost too small for the length of the stem, but which would be perfect on a short stalk - SUMMER SKY and MRS. ROWE come to mind. Crossed with some of the available dwarfs such as ACUTA, BLUE CHARM, SIBIRICA NANA, ORIENTALIS NANA, SKEENA (the true form; there is a taller variety going under the same name) and others, these should produce some dwarfs, if not in the first generation then at least in the second. Many cultivars which are not in themselves small enough to be called dwarfs may carry a gene for this characteristic and, when selfed, might give a fair number of dwarf seedlings. As far as I know it is not known whether dwarfness is a dominant characteristic, a recessive, or the effect of blending. It might be a help to our research committee if some brave soul would make various types of crosses aimed at dwarfness and keep good records for two or three generations, and report on the results. But in any case those who are working on this type of Siberian could be helpful if they would report on their results as they go along. My own VELVET NIGHT, and my STAR WHEEL, were both registered as small - about 20", which is how they grow here though I understand they are taller in other places. I crossed them and have had one seedling bloom from this cross, which was also short, if anything a little smaller than the parents. Another cross of several years back, whose label was lost, gave three small plants; one only about 15" tall; as these seedlings germinated before I had ever bloomed a named variety they have to come from previous seedlings and I know that I had none under 20" so apparently one or more of these taller ones had the ability to produce dwarfs. It seems likely that this characteristic is present in other named varieties, and it would be helpful if anyone turning up dwarf seedlings from their crosses would report the parentages of the crosses involved. Even where parents 30" or more tall produce a few in the 20"-25" range this might indicate that a gene for dwarfness was present in one or other parent. If a list could be assembled of varieties known to have produced small offspring it would give people wanting to work in this field the opportunity to choose from such a list those parents that carried other characteristics wanted for some particular result. For example, someone wants to produce a good clean dark violet dwarf; he checks the list to find one or two good clean dark violet tall, and crosses these; his chance of finding the desired seedling are better, results would be likely to come faster, than if he had to cross any good darks with any other good darks, and probably about twice as good as if he tried crossing a good dark tall with a light or white dwarf and then recrossing the best small offspring with the best dark offspring.

In case you can't wait for such a list to be assembled, here are a few suggestions. Choose as parents varieties that have short, thin, healthy foliage, slim wiry stems, side branches that do not grow as tall as the main stems; clean and vigorous growth habits — no sprawling fans, no

thin roots that can break easily and let the plant heave out in winter, no stems that fall sideways in the first gust of wind after the flowers open. Try to choose flowers that have clean, clear colour. Having eliminated from consideration all plants that do not fit these qualifications, pick from the rest those that have the smallest flowers, the shortest stems, or both. Cross tall stem with short and large flower with small, if you can't find both combined in one plant! If you do have any real dwarfs try selfing them, if they are not too deficient in the qualities suggested above. You may find, of course, that some variety that would be excellent material will not cross with other potential parents in your planting - pod or pollen sterility does exist among the Siberians. In that case you may have to use as one parent a plant that is not fully satisfactory - coarse foliage, thick stem etc. This will probably mean an extra generation of breeding to get good working stock. But this might take no longer than buying more suitable material and waiting for it to become established.

Which reminds me - it would be helpful if our pollen-daubers would tell us what crosses took for them and what didn't, not only in this area of breeding for dwarfs but in all lines of breeding. If a particular variety turned up on several lists as not podding and on none as having podded, we'd know to steer clear of it; and if a variety turned up on many lists as having podded readily or pollenized other varieties freely - that, if it had good characteristics for breeding, would perhaps become the SABLE of the Siberians.

1978 Much, of this article seems to be still appropriate. A few new little ones have been introduced since then; not many. We have had no direct reports of any attempt to breed for dwarfs since that time, and my own efforts have so far not amounted to shucks, though I still try to get pods from the seedlings that I had then to work with. Several pods have been grown but nothing worth having turned up, and as the seedlings used are themselves "parentage unknown", there seemed little point in my writing up the results. I can say with some authority that dwarf x dwarf will produce mostly dwarf - but in each batch one or two taller ones also turned up, and also that in my experience dwarf x dwarf produces somewhat fewer seedlings per batch than tall x tall does. Not only is germination poorer but survival over the first winter in the open is lower. Possibly the latter is the result of smaller, shallower root systems on the small plants, producing more heaving. If this is the case it could be improved by mulching; however, my theories of plant breeding call for letting the seedlings face the roughest conditions my climate can produce in an attempt to insure that anything I finally decide is worth introducing will be able to take a wide range of soil and climate conditions. If they can stand up to our hot and humid spells in summer and winters that frequently see temperatures down almost to zero with little or no snow cover (this year being one of the exceptions) they should be able to cope with almost anything that the weather can throw at them.

Peg Edwards.

MY IRISES

On joining the British Iris Society in 1965, I, like a lot of other people no doubt, could only see the Tall Bearded Iris growing in gardens and Parks. Lack of space turned my attention to the smaller varieties. After trying quite a few of the different species from the Seed Exchange, I finally chose Spurias and Pacific Coast Hybrids, also Siberica and Chamaeiris.

I have an allotment, and it is here that I grow most of my Iris. Derbyshire is recognised as an area with a high lime content in the soil, and some of them are in the shade of the fruit trees, yet they all grow very well indeed.

The Sibericas and Spurias are grown in rows. I find the underground stolons of the Spurias soon integrate making it necessary to divide the plants about every four years, usually around September.

A good mulch of home-made compost seems to be as good as anything for feeding them and keeping them healthy. My Pacific Coast seeds I sow as soon as harvested; after exposure to the frosts, the tiny shoots appear, and I get very good germination,

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that I have seed available to members. A list appears at the end of this Newsletter.

Eric Elliott.

PROGRESS NOTE ON TETRAPLOIDY – 1977

(This article first appeared in the October, 1977, issue of The Review, the Journal of the Society for Japanese Irises (U.S.A.) from which it is reprinted by kind permission of the Editor, Mr. W. Ouweneel)

Once again Bill Ouweneel has asked me for a progress note regarding my tetraploid Japanese Irises; so, at the risk of telling a tale too often, I will give a brief report about the 1977 season. Those who have read my previous notes (1-4) will know that, whereas I have had colchicine-induced tetraploids and chimeras for a number of years, crosses made with them either failed or gave only diploids until 1975. In that year five second-generation tetraploid sister seedlings bloomed (T₂73/9)(1-5) but were far from impressive although of use for breeding. In 1976 one more (T₂73/5) bloomed and showed improvement although I was still unsure that tetraploidy in Japanese irises would offer the advantages that it has in tall bearded irises, Siberians and other plants. However, the experience of this past season has been encouraging.

One new second generation tetraploid bloomed (T₂75/3) from a cross of two induced tetraploids involving GARDEN CAPRICE and several seedlings. This one is quite impressive. It is a large, three-petalled flower basically white but splashed with red at the outer third of the falls. The latter are wide with great substance and crispness. In addition several third generation

seedlings from crosses of the ugly sisters mentioned above were distinctly better than their parents though still not impressive.

Among new induced tetraploids blooming for the first time were several three-petalled flowers; one wide dark blue with extremely velvety texture, another pure white with only a few green lines instead of a signal patch, another a jaunty flower closely veined red and a fourth one of large size, very ruffled with sanded blue falls and violet standards edged lighter. Among the 6-petalled flowers was a white of fine form with unobtrusive signal patches more green than yellow. Another, iris a seedling x FROSTBOUND, was a sectorial chimera in which the tetraploid flowers were crisper and more vivid in colour than the diploid ones but not significantly larger.

This 1977 experience makes it clear, I believe, that tetraploidy increases the substance of the flowers and makes the colour richer. As a result the flowers have a crisp and lively appearance which I find attractive. Whether the tetraploid state is responsible for the unobtrusive greenish signal patches in several of the white ones, or whether this occurred in them purely by genetic chance I do not know, but suspect the latter.

Of the 60-odd crosses made this year, about two-thirds were tetraploid, many of which have resulted in pods of healthy appearance. Hence I am expecting a steadily increasing number of second and third generation tetraploids. Furthermore my breeding stock of superior diploids has been greatly enlarged this year through the generous help of Art Hazzard, Dr. Hirao, Bill Ouweneel and Adolph Vogt. As a result I look forward to having an increasing number of seedlings of high quality for treatment with colchicine in the next few years which, I trust, will be reflected in steady improvement in the resulting tetraploids.

Currier McEwen.

References

1. McEwen, C. Efforts to induce tetraploidy in Japanese Irises.
The Review- Vol. 8, No.1, page 9 (April 1971)
2. " " 1972 Tetraploidy Report
The Review- Vol. 10, No.1, page 8 (April 1973)
3. " " Further Report on Efforts to Induce Tetraploidy in Japanese Irises
The Review. Vol. 11, No.1, page 3 (April 1974)
4. " " Tetraploidy - 1976 Experience
The Review. Vol. 13, No.2, page 28 (October 1976)

THE GROUP LIBRARY

The following publications are available on loan. Please keep them for a reasonable length of time only - other members may be asking for them. Also, it will help the funds of the Group if you will refund postage to the Librarian.

Library Contents:

Newsletter of the Spuria Iris Society Fall 1976, Spring 1977, Fall 1977

The Review of the Society for Japanese Irises-.Oct. 1976, April 1977, Oct. 1977

The Siberian Iris (Journal of the Siberian Iris Society)..., Fall 1977

The Genus Iris - subsection Sibiricae - B.I.S.

Alphabetical Table and Cultivation Guide to the Species - B.I.S.

Please write to the Librarian:

Mrs. J. Hewitt, Haygarth, Cleeton St, Mary, Cleobury Mortimer, Kidderminster.

P.S. to SHOW REPORT

Ray Jeffs is to be congratulated on winning a First with a stem of iris pseudacorus, a tetraploid form which he was given by Eckard Berlin whom Ray visited whilst in Germany. This aroused a lot of comment and interest.

(Typist's apologies - this omission was her fault, not the Editor's!)

SEED DISTRIBUTION

The following seeds are available at the moment:

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| SPURIA 6 large packets collected from the garden of the late Alex Back, probably from assorted species and hybrids | 25p per pkt. |
| SPURIA 2 (from Alex Back) Pale blue, yellow signal | 5p per pkt. |
| SPURIA 6 (" " ") Cream yellow | 5p per pkt. |
| SPURIA ORIENTALIS (OCHROLEUCA) | 5 pkts at 5p per pkt. |
| LAEVIGATAE - PSEUDACORUS BASTARDII | 5 pkts at 5p per pkt |

Would you please kindly add the postage when you send for any seeds. Also, as you can see, our Seed Bank is not very large, and we like to help our friends overseas, so perhaps you will send your spare seed to the Seed Distribution Officer, to assist him in his task of supplying as many members as possible.

Thank you,

Seed Distribution Officer:

Mr. E. Elliott, 27 Nelson Street, Cotmanhay, Ilkeston, Derbyshire, DE7 8PA.

THE GROUPS OFFICERS

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Please note the NEW ADDRESS of our Secretary/Treasurer and send her your subscription for 1978-79 if you have not already done so. Our year runs from June 1st - May 31st and the subscription is still only 50p. However there are some people who expressed interest in the Group and are receiving the Newsletter whose subscriptions have not yet arrived. Please send them soon. Others are generously paying more, and selling their iris plants to defray costs. The Editor hopes you will not think that her appointment will increase the subscription, because she is selling every iris she has available to cut down on expenses.

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PLANTS AVAILABLE SHORTLY

I hope to have shortly a number of plants for distribution to Group members. Those are Spuriae which, were collected from Ales Back's garden and comprise some "aurea selected seedlings" which should be quite nice in the garden, and a blue spuria with a bright yellow signal patch. If you would like to have some of them and are willing to refund the postage involved in sending them to you, would you please let me know as soon as possible.

Jennifer Hewitt (address page 11)

NEXT ISSUE

This is due in January 1979 and the Editor will be very grateful for contributions for it.