

THE REVIEW
OF
THE SOCIETY FOR JAPANESE IRISES

Vol. 14, No. 1

April, 1977

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A STRANGE TIME FOR ALL

Thornton M. Abell

If the reports are accurate, those of you who live east of the Rockies must have had a strenuous winter. I hope the Japanese iris are satisfied. I understand they like a cold winter---unless this suited them too well. It will be interesting to hear how they do this summer. As for California, we have had practically no rain. The weather has been clear and generally mild. The bearded iris are coming along better than usual. The Japanese are just starting to show growth and it is too soon to know how they withstood our winter (!).

Whatever the weather, I look forward each year for the time when blooming begins; it is a new lease on life and I hope each of you will have some of the same pleasures.

JAPANESE IRIS---SUCCESS OR FAILURE?*

Marthella Shoemake

I wasn't born in Missouri, but my mother was, and I sometimes think the stubbornness carries over to the second generation; so. . . when someone told me that Japanese Iris were 'difficult' to grow, that immediately became my burning ambition. I planted my first Japs about four years ago, following faithfully the Melrose Gardens recipe for the Acid Bed which they print in their catalogs. My first additions were Worley Pink, which bloomed once and is still surviving (but barely): Star at Midnight, a dark violet which has bloomed faithfully every year since; Stippled Ripples, a white with red border; and Reign of Glory, a white with blue. Also Snowy Hills, a beautiful white which bloomed one year and died the next. I used cotton seed mulch and fertilized twice a year with azalea food.

At about this point, heady with power and know-how, I extolled the virtues of Japanese Iris to all who would listen; pooh-poohing those who moaned at what my water bill must cost. Not so! I insisted. Japanese Iris like water in the Spring, true. . .but they don't need to swim the year around.

I ordered the set of AIS slides of Japanese Iris and bulldozed the program chairman into showing them (This wasn't too difficult since I outweigh him considerably!). Naturally, I picked out some great cultivars from the list that I just had to have. Those that survive up to now are: Glitter and Gaiety, Dancing Waves (barely hanging on), Ivory Gown and Yamoto Hima. Leave Me Sighing did so, almost immediately, ditto Confetti Showers. I was late with their feeding this last spring and several blooms had a bad case of 'limber neck.' In the final audit I feel the successes greatly outweigh the failures and will continue to do my best to grow Japanese Iris and try to interest others in their beauty.

*excerpt reprinted with permission from the Sooner State Iris News.

HOOKED ON JAPANESE IRISES*

D. Olen Rawdon, Past RVP Region 6

Some fifteen years ago I purchased Elinor Perry, La Favorite and Violet Harrison. As you know, they are nothing to brag about. So I just grew them for about five years. I didn't give any thought to hybridizing.

Now, here is where I got hooked. Our oldest son worked evenings at a Woolworth store. When he was in high school he became interested in tropical fish. A friend of ours mentioned that there was a greenhouse near our home that raised tropical fish for wholesale and retail trade. So we took the boys over. While there I mentioned that I grew and hybridized TB irises. A lady there said she wanted some TBs but didn't know where to find them. So she came over to our place and I sold her an order.

About three weeks later we visited the greenhouse again. To get there you cross a small creek. While I was parking I saw something blooming in a bog area. So I took a walk and found Japanese irises six to eight feet tall where the area was partly shaded. When I asked the lady if she would sell some she said she would swap some for more TBs. So I labeled about a dozen and picked up the JIs in September.

In my garden the JIs grew about 30 to 36 inches high. After the first year the colors were so bright and there were so many different patterns that I decided to hybridize them. The JIs were all three-petaled, but starting with them I began to get six and eight petals.

At this point I decided to buy some of the later introductions. That was when things started to happen. I have ten or twelve finished seedlings. I will register four this year. Two irises I have had good luck with as pod parents are World Delight and Rose Tower. I have two nice seedlings from World Delight---one almost white with a light blue border, the other a rose-pink without veining but with small lines almost the same color. Rose Tower has given me four or five seedlings which range from dark red to variegated and half white.

I visited my good friend Art Hazzard the last two years at the peak JI bloom. Now I have about thirty named varieties to work with. I have perfect soil for them. It is a muck-type soil, water will not stand on it, drainage is quick and good and I seldom water. In Ohio we have plenty of spring rain most years. I do not fertilize much. I use dehydrated cow manure and compost which is made of street department leaves and my own. I even put my discarded seedlings in this compost. My increase is excellent---in fact, I think, too much.

*Editor's note: This article was written early in 1976.

Until last spring I had no trouble with disease. Then I noticed I had three clumps about eight inches tall with foliage that looked like TB scorch. By the middle of June they had died completely. Before they died I raised one clump, divided it into ten divisions which were replanted, and six survived. When the State Inspector comes I will let him take a clump to the State labs if my trouble continues. I am wondering if anyone else has had this problem. I would be glad to hear from them. I had replanted these clumps the summer before in soil that had never had JIs before. I talked to Art Hazzard about this problem, who said he had not had any problem like this before. It is possible that it could be winter damage, as we did not have much snow last winter and I did not mulch.

I grow about one hundred clumps, forty of which are named varieties. The remainder are seedlings which I use for hybridizing. I will dump them in a couple of years. I have four to five hundred seedlings each year. It takes me two years to bloom seedlings.

I also grow about 200 TBs, 200 MDBs, 200 SDB, 25 pumila species, spuria and Siberians---also 20 tetraploid daylilies plus about 2,000 seedlings from them.

THE WHY AND HOW OF JAPANESE IRIS SHOWS

A. H. Hazzard

The speaker was making a strong bid for Regional Test Gardens and asked the question: "What will they do for Japanese irises?" After a very noticeable pause came the answer: "I am sorry, nothing." Of course, this would be true only in areas where bloom seasons do not substantially overlap.

The obvious solution is Japanese iris shows, of which there have been four in Region 6 (1963, 64, 66, and 68) and one in Region 21 (1965). All were successful, but as the one in Terre Haute (1966) was the largest, it will be beneficial to examine their program for sections and classes and discuss policies which have been employed advantageously by all.

The format is similar to that of a regular TB show, the American Iris Society Show Rules are closely followed, and any exceptions or special conditions are spelled out in the program. These were as follows. "c/m" stands for conspicuous markings.

Section A---singles (3-petal)

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. White, self | 15. Purple, blends |
| 2. Ivory white, seld | 16. Red purple |
| 3. White, with c/m | 17. Violet self, light |
| 4. Pink, self | 18. Violet self, dark |
| 5. Pink, with c/m | 19. Violet, with c/m |
| 6. Red | 20. Violet, blends |
| 7. Red with c/m | 21. Purple violet with lavenders |
| 8. Light blue | 22. Purple violet with browns |
| 9. Medium blue | 23. Bluish violet, light |
| 10. Dark blue | 24. Bluish violet, dark |
| 11. Blue with c/m | 25. Bitones |
| 12. Purple self | 26. Bicolors |
| 13. Purple, self, dark | 27. Others |
| 14. Purple with c/m | |

Classes may be increased or decreased in number, within AIS limits, depending on the nature and quantity of available irises. Other sections may be as follows:

Section B, doubles (6-petal)

Classes 1 to 27 as above

Section C, peony type (9 or more petals)

Classes 1 to 27 as above

Section D, potted plants

No classes.

Section E, arrangements

No classes.

Section F, seedlings

No classes.

It is very helpful if there is at least one sizable planting available from which to obtain buds and blooms to be used by the arrangers. If it is a commercial planting and not allowed to compete in Sections A to F, inclusive, sections can be added to accomodate both Commercial and Educational exhibits and awards provided. Commercial plantings were allowed to compete in the Terre Haute show.

The show location is of prime importance and should have as much public exposure as possible. Mall lobbies, bank community rooms and civic auditoriums, if centrally located, are usually satisfactory.

It is desirable to have a sponsor, and frequently the local Iris Society is ideal. The members are now interested to a much greater extent in all types of irises and many are experienced in classifying and staging. Also, niches for arrangements and other useful items are often made available by the group.

For specimens, rose vases are usually better than TB containers and sometimes may be borrowed or rented from a neighboring Rose Society. It helps if membership lines cross to some extent.

Be sure to have the required number of qualified AIS Judges engaged, an adequate supply of ribbons, rosettes and awards and DATE YOUR PROGRAM.

Japanese iris slides are available at the AIS and may be set up with a two-way screen (a pane of clear glass and a piece of tissue paper work fine) and an automatic projector. A good location for this is near the entrance---it holds the interest of those having limited time and reduces congestion in the show area.

Used as door prizes and awards, JI rhizomes are very satisfactory and may result in starting new plantings.

In all planting, keep the Japanese motif in mind. If possible, enlist the services of a Bonsai enthusiast for specimens and demonstration of methods. Invite persons of Japanese ancestry to appear in Japanese apparel and perhaps assist in judging arrangements---there are numerous schools of thought on arranging and frequently judges are familiar with but two or three.

To secure the maximum benefit from both amateur and commercial entries, the Queen of the Show and her Court may be selected from the former and the King, with perhaps a Court, from the latter. This is particularly desirable if there are several new or outstanding varieties involved, although as a rule duplications should be avoided.

The Classification Committee will find the Check List of Japanese Irises prepared by Eleanor Westmeyer and Bee Warburton in 1966 to be very useful and varieties subsequently introduced may be classified from Introduction Check Lists.

The importance of the Publicity Committee cannot be over-emphasized. If chaired by one who is well known in local circles, many avenues of assistance may be open in addition to those usually employed. They may include The Review, the local press, TV and radio programs, window displays in banks and department stores and other vantage points, garden clubs, Chambers of Commerce and City Commissions. In fact, any innovation which may be aligned with the Japanese motif may be valuable. Potted plants in bloom have been particularly effective in window displays and bank lobbies. Plants may be lifted from nursery rows, potted and displayed until bloom is completed and then

returned to the field without damage if watering has been adequate. The potting should be done a couple of days before terminal buds open. The pots should be placed in two to four inches of water overnight and well drained before being displayed.

It is true that a successful show requires considerable time and effort and the chief objection to the staging of exclusively Japanese iris shows has been that the burden often devolves upon the persons who were most active in the earlier TB show. However, the personnel need not be the same and such a show provides an opportunity for other members to acquire valuable experience which broadens the capabilities of the group. Please, also keep in mind that, "He who says it can't be done is often interrupted by someone doing it."

LESSON '76

W. E. Ouweneel

For eighteen years I have grown JIs seriously. I started by growing them around the edge of a pond under ideal conditions which will be detailed below. When I needed more space I started beds under ordinary field conditions.

During the last four or five years I have gradually had to reduce the amount of manual labor I could perform. As a result, plants due for division just had to continue without it, knowing that sooner or later they would show the neglect. The only question was when and how. Fertilizing also was deliberately passed by, hoping thereby to postpone the final outcome. One of our JI Robin members remarked that, "JI plants just seemed to get old and die." I waited to see.

I have frequently said that JIs can be grown successfully under my field conditions. The soil is commonly called clay. Purdue University calls it brown loam. Our average annual rainfall is about forty inches. Winter temperatures usually fall below 10°F, frequently below 0° and once during the eighteen-year period to minus 25°F.

1976, however, was not an average year. Starting in April, each month during the growing season rainfall was about two-thirds normal. That, together with other factors noted previously and below, proved disastrous in the beds. Fortunately, I think, I was able to draw some useful conclusions from the experience.

Let's begin with the happy part of the eighteen year's experience.

My pond is a small, artificial one lying in a ravine that runs east and west with the dam at the west end. It was built originally to hold water for farm stock and had a maximum depth of about three feet. Over the years leaves from my trees and silt from my neighbor's field have accumulated in the ravine reducing the size of the pond and depositing about eighteen inches of muck in the bottom of the pond.

The first JI planting was made at the foot of the dam practically on the level of the water. For each plant a hole was dug about the size of a bushel basket and filled with muck scooped out of the pond. The planting was successful and, whenever the pond dried up during a few dry falls, the bed was extended across the dam and along the north side of the pond. A terrace about three feet wide was first constructed about six inches above the water. A trench about two feet wide and spade deep was then dug in the terrace and filled with muck. Plants were placed two feet center to center.

Eventually the terrace held about eighty plants. Almost all of them are still there--the oldest eighteen years and the newest ten years. They have never been divided. They have been used as stock for divisions but that has not reduced their increase noticeably. Plants near the open water are so close that one can barely step between them and the water. Many are now twenty or more inches in diameter and produce twenty or more bloom stalks annually. Most of the plants are in full sun all day.

The muck is black and plastic-gooey being the common Hoosier word for it. When divisions are dug the first step in cleaning them is to squeeze the soil off of the roots. Purdue University reports the muck to contain 300 pounds of phosphate and 235 pounds of potash per acre and a pH of 4.0. I probably can thank my neighbor for the high fertilizer content.

Visitors have frequently wondered at the success of my pond planting because of belief that under such conditions they should not be surviving winters. I can only point to the plants and say that under these conditions they not only survive but love it. The pond freezes over every year solid enough for skating and at least during several winters has frozen solid into the muck. One fall while the pond level was low I planted one JI too far out. When the level was restored, the plant was surrounded with water and, during the next two winters, frozen solid in ice. It did not increase but did survive. My experience is confirmed by that of Ole Melgaard of Trenton, N.J., who reports that, "Freezing the soggy soil has never done any harm here."

So the conclusion for '76 is that plants around the pond need no dividing and no fertilizing. They just grow there naturally. The only problem is weeds. They love it too.

In the beds the story was different. They are on high, level ground in full sun and can be watered only by carrying water about 500 feet. This is done in limited quantities and only in special cases. The beds are heavily mulched with wood chips obtained from tree trimmers.

As noted earlier, for several years regular division and fertilization of plants has been neglected knowing that a penalty would be paid sooner or later. The drought during the '76 blooming season settled that question. During April, May and June the rainfall was about two-thirds of normal--7.66 inches versus 11.76 inches. The loss was heavy and will not be fully known until the '77 season. The lessons to be learned, however, are not from what died but what survived.

The beds contain, besides plants overdue for division, plants one to three years old. Some of these were allowed to grow without special care in '76, but a few very special ones were fertilized with solution and watered with water brought in with buckets. Both of these groups showed a higher rate of survival than those overdue for division.

My conclusion is that for my situation losses in beds were due solely to lack of moisture and nutrients caused basically by my intentional neglect but capped by the drought. Old plants apparently die of starvation because they are large and impose a heavy demand for moisture and nutrients on a small local area around the plants. Successful growing in my beds required normal rainfall, heavy mulching, maintenance of fertility, and division at least every three years.

Back Issues of The Review

Back issues of THE REVIEW have been sold for fifty cents each. In one respect this has been unfair to SJI members, because non-members have been able to purchase the two issues published each year for \$1.00 whereas members paid \$2.00. Sending back numbers usually involves some correspondence and third class rates have risen steadily. About five extra copies of each issue are printed.

Therefore, with the approval of Thornton M. Abell, President of the SJI, the charge for members in the future will be increased to \$.75 and to non-members to \$1.00.

SOUTHWEST REGIONAL REPORT

W. J. Gunther

On March 20, 1977, the San Diego-Imperial Counties Iris Society met at the home of Clarke Cosgrove, the President of the American Iris Society. On display on the speaker's table for that meeting were bloomstalks of several types of irises, and it is a particular delight to report that of them all, those which really 'stole the show' were three different Japanese irises made up into a beautiful floral arrangement. The three Japanese iris varieties which were in bloom for that event, March 20, were 'Sky and Water,' 'Umibotaru,' and 'Sea Titan.' With that good start, it becomes apparent that again this year there will be a good number of Japanese irises in bloom in southern California during the tall bearded iris season---which is the season when irises are popularized to the general public by means of iris shows. By all indications, we will have Japanese irises available in bloom to enter in the local iris shows of this season.

Last year we reported that local hobby growers of Japanese irises had been taking potted Japanese irises, in bloom, to Balboa Park in San Diego, where with the very willing cooperation of the Park Department they were displayed in the botanical building, which is the largest lath house in the world. We also reported that as a result, local retail nurseries were getting persistent requests from customers for Japanese irises.

What developed thereafter is interesting. It seems that in response to the many requests from customers for Japanese irises, the local retail nurseries asked their suppliers, which in this area are called 'wholesale growers,' for Japanese irises. It seems that none of the local 'wholesale growers' had any Japanese irises to provide, but that they are members of an Association, one of whose functions is to obtain for its members growing stock which they need but do not have on hand. Apparently, the Association did not know of any commercial growers of Japanese irises in the USA, and accordingly when it was confronted with a demand for Japanese irises it decided that it must send to Japan for them. That is what it did. And as a result, after a few weeks, the local retail nurseries suddenly had Japanese irises for sale. Real Japanese irises! Named and labeled varieties originated in Japan, grown in Japan, and imported from Japan!

Within a very short time, all of those imported Japanese irises had been sold to local gardeners. And among the local gardeners who bought some of those imports for her own garden is Ada Perry, who happens to be the best-known and most widely read garden columnist of San Diego's largest newspaper. In her garden column in the San Diego Union, Ada Perry now is giving

regular reports on how her Japanese iris varieties are doing in her garden. From one perspective, this is good---because it contributes still more local publicity about Japanese irises. But from another perspective it is bad---because the varieties she is reporting on are imports from Japan which are not registered with the American Iris Society.

It is worrisome that a good many local gardeners suddenly are growing a number of named varieties of Japanese irises which are not AIS registered, and that these varieties are being publicized locally. It is worrisome because it is almost inevitable that these non-AIS-registered varieties soon will be showing up as entries in local iris shows, which are AIS accredited and which are judged by AIS judges who are supposed to follow AIS rules. These judges know well that iris varieties which are not registered with the AIS are not eligible for AIS awards, including AIS ribbons. But they also know that it would be quite ridiculous to refuse to award a ribbon to a classic Japanese iris variety which, for instance, is not registered with the American Iris Society for the very, very good reason that it was originated and named and introduced in Japan many years before the American Iris Society ever came into existence.

Shuichi Hirao's monumental 1971 book The Japanese Iris is the world's most authoritative register of Japanese iris varieties: it contains close-up, full-color photographs of three hundred forty six (346) different Japanese iris varieties, together with detailed descriptive information on each of them, each description being in the English language as well as the Japanese. But sadly, most of the irises pictured and described in that book are not eligible for AIS ribbons in AIS shows because they are not registered with the AIS. Maybe the Society for Japanese Irises, as a Section of AIS, should formally request the AIS Board of Directors to authorize AIS judges to award AIS ribbons to every Japanese iris variety which is illustrated and recognized and described in Shuichi Hirao's reference work. That action could resolve a problem which otherwise might soon develop into another painful point of contention in the AIS.

Now 'tis the spring, and weeds are shallow rooted;
Suffer them now and they'll o'ergrow the garden.

Shakespeare, King Henry VI

FINANCIAL STATEMENT JAN. 1, 1976 TO DEC. 31, 1976

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Cash in Savings account Jan. 1, 1976 | \$278.52 |
| Cash in Checking account Jan. 1, 1976 | 274.35 |

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | <u>Deposits</u> | |
| Dues | \$ 8.00 | |
| Dues | 103.50 | |
| Dues | 7.00 | |
| Dues | 108.00 | |
| Iris sale---Region 1 | 46.00 | |
| | <u>\$272.50</u> | |
| | | <u>272.50</u> |
| | | <u>\$546.85</u> |

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|-------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| | <u>Expenses</u> | |
| April Review---Printing | 101.92 | |
| Covers | 6.52 | |
| Postage | 32.40 | |
| Miscellaneous Postage | 3.57 | |
| Median Iris Society---Section | | |
| Section Membership Notices | 17.50 | |
| October Review---Printing | 44.31 | |
| Covers | 10.96 | |
| Postage | 17.36 | |
| Miscellaneous Postage | 3.81 | |
| | <u>\$238.35</u> | |

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| Cash in Checking account Dec. 31, 1976 | 308.50 |
| Savings Account Jan. 1, 1976 | \$278.52 |
| Interest received | 14.52 |
| | <u>\$293.04</u> |
| | <u>293.04</u> |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Total Cash on Hand, Dec. 31, 1976 | \$601.54 |
|-----------------------------------|----------|

Lord L. Grant
Treasurer