

For Iris Lovers in the Cold Zones



Aurora

Newsletter of the Can-West Iris Society

Winter/Spring, 2018

Volume 12, Issue 1

Update From the Organizing Committee

We have almost made it through. After a roller coaster winter, fake spring, the second winter, major March storms and everything Mother Nature has seen fit to hit us with, from the warmth of the sun this past week or so it just might be that the real and true spring is on its way. Finally!

We have a lot to look forward to this year, it being the 15th anniversary of our group's creation. After a bumpy start, we have hit our stride and CWIS continues to thrive an amazing 15 years later because of you, our members. We say it a lot, but we could not keep going if not for our members' support. CWIS really does rock!

Within these pages and with thoughts of spring dancing in our heads, an article on spring iris care starts on page 2 (warning, graphic images included). This is followed on page 4 with details on the visit of 2018's guest judges Sandy Ives and Maureen Mark including information on an exclusive member's educational opportunity, show information and a call for volunteers. On page 5 we have a brief listing of some member submitted plant sales.

And the major feature of the spring newsletter, the Member Profile, appears on page 6. This time, member Andrea Karpinski shares her iris story.

So with visions of the upcoming bloom season coming soon, sit back, relax and enjoy the read. As always, if you have article ideas, questions or need to contact the Organizing Committee, just send us an email. We can be contacted at:

B. J. Jackson, jacksonb@mts.net

Jennifer Bishop, Jennifer@dataways.com

Deborah Petrie, martyaddict@gmail.com

Eleanor Hutchison, eleanore@mymts.net



Spring Care For Irises

(By: BJ Jackson)

Although we often hear that cold temperatures are the biggest threat to our irises, this is not true. It is, rather, the vagaries of the cold climate spring. You know what I am talking about. The freeze-thaw cycles that occur repeatedly before true spring really arrives are more of a threat than cold.

When I first started growing iris, the routine was dig a hole and plant it roots pointed down. That's it. In those days we were told to plant it with the 'sun on its back' which meant just at the surface. Over the long term, especially for the tall bearded and more modern variations, this does not work for us. Over the years it has been determined that cold climate growers should plant below the soil surface between one-half and one inch deep. Personally, I have had the best success at one-half inch, just so the top of the rhizome is covered.

Then there is mulch. If you have been gardening for any length of time, you will know that mulching can be a cold climate gardener's best friend or worst enemy in spring. Do you use it for winter protection? I normally do not unless I have added new irises to the garden or done a lot of dividing and replanting or moving things around. The fall of 2017 was the first time in a long time that I have done any major garden renovations. I dug and divided a lot of irises and other plants. I did all of these things and then some last season so decided mulching would be a good idea.

Mulch is one of the simplest, most effective ways to protect the iris. I used shredded leaves but you can also use pine needles, straw, compost or even just additional soil from the garden to make a 4 inches or so layer around the base of the plant. The key point, however, is when and how to remove it. Once the snow has started to recede and the topmost layer is dry, the mulch can start to be removed depending, of course, on the weather. Do not remove it all at once. I employ a 3 or 4 step process depending on the amount of mulch used.

As soon as the mulch is exposed, I start by fluffing it up a bit which allows air to get in and begin the drying process. Then once the top layer has dried, remove it from the top as it dries. As the remaining ice and snow recedes, remove a bit more and when all the snow and ice has completely retreated, remove the last of it leaving a totally mulch free iris patch. Using this multi-step approach encourages air flow among and between the plants which can lessen disease and assist in a more gradual drying out of the garden. Once this is done, I start the 'heaving'

patrols. This involves a periodic walk through the irises looking for any rhizomes that may have heaved out of the ground in one of the freeze-thaw cycles that occur frequently in spring. I used to blame the squirrels or neighbourhood cats for this but now understand they were not responsible. When I find one heaved (and there always are some) I push it back into the soil and place a rock (size of rock dependent on size of rhizome) to anchor it down so the roots can once more become established. Before replanting, it is important to notice whether the rhizome tissue is still firm and not soft or desiccated (dried out). There is no point to resetting a rhizome that is no longer viable. For the most part though, these rhizomes are salvageable. This process takes some time but it is worthwhile when you see them growing and thriving further on in the season. They may or may not bloom in the current season, but they will survive to bloom another season. Whether or not to leave the rock anchor in place is personal preference but I usually do.

Another spring iris care issue that needs to be addressed is damaged rhizomes. You may see split rhizomes, particularly on larger iris. I am told that this can occur as a result of the moisture content of the rhizome. If there is no mulch and it freezes and thaws quickly, the rhizome can split. This damage can invite disease into the rhizome tissue and the end result could be rot. Check any suspect rhizomes for firmness. If soft or softening, dig it up and cut back to firm healthy tissue, dust with a fungicide (I use Comet, yes, the bathroom cleaning powder) and replant. If the mother rhizome is soft throughout, check for increases, little nubbins on the sides of the mother, and if they are of a decent size, firm and healthy with good looking roots, remove them and either plant them in pots to grow on or replant them in the garden. And use your nose during your walkabouts. Iris crown rot smells awful. If you should catch a nasty smell, investigate it by following your nose to the affected rhizome. The rhizome may appear fine but when touched will collapse and the mushy insides will be revealed. The eyes can miss things the nose can find.



Heaved and rotted rhizome



Split TB rhizome with mould

Exclusive Educational Opportunity

Sandy Ives and Maureen Mark will be offering an educational opportunity on Saturday, June 2nd for CWIS members in advance of the show on Sunday, June 3rd. Sandy will give a session on Siberian iris and Maureen is doing garden training. Whether you're interested in becoming an AIS Iris Judge or not please join us. Should you wish to participate for AIS credit, all you need is the current Judge's Handbook, 'The Handbook for Judges and Show Officials, Seventh Edition', which you can order here:

http://irises.org/Member_Services/AIS_Storefront.html#listing

The sessions will be held at the home gardens of CWIS member Sandy Eggertson in St. Andrews. The sessions will run from 1 to 4 pm. For further information, please contact eleanore@mymts.net not later than May 20th.

Bring your own lawn chair!

11th Annual Show! **Sunday, June 3rd, Bourkevale Community Centre**

Admission is free and we are open to the public from 1 to 4 p.m.

Show Chair: B.J. Jackson, jacksonb@mts.net

Exhibitor information is available in the full show schedule you will have received in a separate file along with this newsletter. It can also be downloaded from the website at: <http://cwis.webplus.net/> . Just click on "Go There" under 2018 show schedule. If you would like show tags to prepare prior to the show, please contact the show chair and they will be sent out to you via Canada Post. A review of everything you need to know about entering stems can be found throughout the Spring 2008 newsletter at

<http://cwis.webplus.net/CWIS%20spring%202008%20newsletter.pdf>

We are looking for volunteers, too, so if you have an hour or two to spare, please let us know. We cannot do what we do without your support. Assistance is required with everything from setting up tables to organizing and setting out display containers, greeting visitors in the afternoon, helping out in the kitchen or at the rhizome sale table, etc. Just let us know when you are available and we will find a job for you! The rhizome sale table can always use your donations, too, so please have a look when the snow is gone and see if you have anything to donate.

Coming Events

Following are member submitted plant sales for spring 2018:

- **Gardens Manitoba - Gardening Saturday**, CMU North Campus, 500 Shafesbury Blvd. Winnipeg, April 28th, 9 am to 3 pm
- **Transcona Garden Club**, 328 Whittier Avenue West, Winnipeg, May 12th, 9 am to 2 pm
- **Beausejour Daylily Gardens**, First Street North in Beausejour, Saturday, May 19th, 9 am to 1 pm
- **Brandon Garden Club**, 2020 McGregor Ave. Brandon, Saturday, May 26th, 9 am till until sell out
- **Westman Gardeners**, 3032 Park Avenue, Brandon, Saturday, May 26th, 9 am to 1 pm



←←←
*Seedling Royal
Overtime x
Saturday Night Live*
→→→
*White garden with
Seedlings at back and
TB Lacy Snowflake at
front*



←←←
*TB Enchanted
Memory*
→→→
TB No Bikini Atoll



*Andrea Karpinski's
Profile begins on next
page.
All photos on the
following pages are
hers.*

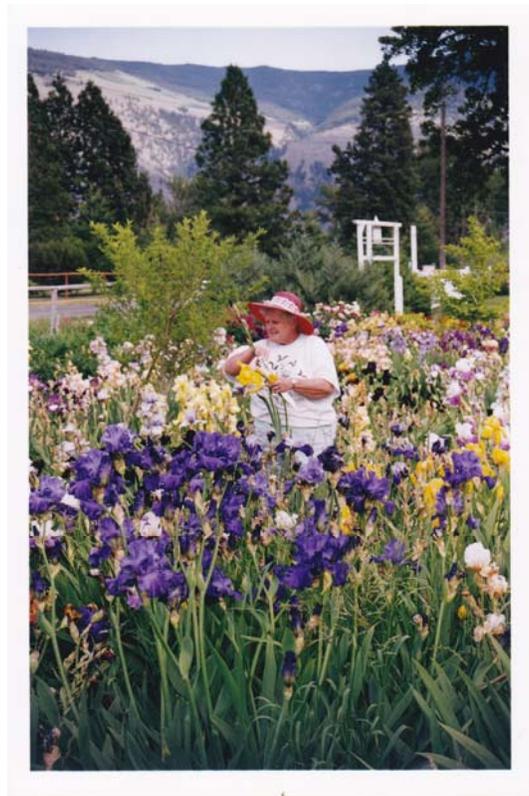
Member Profile

My Iris Story

(By: Andrea Karpinski, Kelowna BC)

Hi my name is Andrea (aka Iris Lady) and my husband says iris is my crack. I am not sure exactly how it all started. I suppose like many other iris people my mother had a lot to do with it. My Mom started growing irises in the late 1980's and when my Dad retired they moved to a small farm in Cawston B.C. I had taken a few irises before they sold their house in Kelowna, digging out the rhizomes in late summer because I liked their names. Little did I realize it was the beginning of my iris obsession. I found the flowers to be beautiful and they flourished in their new home.

Meanwhile at the farm, Mom started to buy and grow iris on a larger scale to enjoy, share and sell. She had lots of flower catalogues in the house including the Schreiner's catalogue with lots of pictures of the newer varieties. My sisters and I enjoyed browsing through them picking the ones irises we liked best. Mom's favourites were the tall bearded and she had close to 200 different ones by 2003.



*Andrea's Mom in her
iris garden 2004*

Of course she always invited me to select some more to plant at my own place but I resisted till my own family moved to a new home. I took a lot of plants from my old house to the new one, including the irises and selected another 10 from my Mom's to plant in my new flowerbeds.

Then in 2010 it happened! The iris virus bit me and I didn't even realize it! After perusing an older Chuck Chapman Iris catalogue at Mom and Dad's, I asked Mom if I could have it. Of course she said yes. I discovered that Chuck had a website and looked through every cultivator and carefully selected 8 to order. Chuck was out of 2 cultivators I wanted but those were substituted by 2 others I had suggested and I received 2 bonus rhizomes! BONUS!! Over the next few years I seriously began to find and purchase more iris for my "collection". I joined the American Iris Society and the Iris Lover's group on Facebook, which opened a huge window of new and exciting varieties of iris - not only TB but also the other classes. Talls, medians and dwarf iris began finding their way to my flowerbeds. I even started adding Siberian iris and tried germinating some Pacific Coast seed that I purchased through the SIGNA seed exchange group. Only one PCI has survived our winters so far and it is still in my garden. I also discovered that I still have a dozen PCI seeds left so I may try to geminate those one day.

My parents sold their farm and moved to a smaller city lot around 2006 and Mom was only able to take a few iris with her but she continued to purchase some new ones and occasionally shared those with me. It's hard to quench that iris desire. I had a few no name irises which I wanted to identify and I remembered my aunt who lived fairly close to me had iris from my Mom, so when the iris were blooming in May my husband and I went to her home to see what she had. She has almost as many varieties as my Mom had with a most of them now classified as historic. I ordered some for myself and my new friend Kirsten in Saskatchewan whom I met through the Facebook Iris Lover's group and whom shared my 'Iris Addiction'. It is kind of funny to think that our mindset at the time was..."I like this iris, I want this iris, and where can I get this iris from?" Kirsten introduced me to the Can-West Iris Society, Trail's End, and Ted Baker's Iris Gardens (which I discovered was in my own back yard on Salt Spring Island, BC). I also connected with Iris Obsession's Marianne (Unruh) who lives 94 km from me. Now we are on iris overload!

In 2014 I was looking through Australia's "Tempo Two Iris Garden" catalogue, which I discovered I could get for free from just contacting Barry Blyth by email. Barry wrote "Hybridizing is fun and easy. Why not try it yourself?" So I said, "Okay then.... I will try it". I made my first uneducated crosses in spring of that year. About 8 crosses took and I got lots of seeds! I discovered through the Facebook iris group how and when to plant the seeds and sowed them in October.

In 2016 my first hybridized irises bloomed with some very good results and a few not so good. In the meantime I studied more about hybridizing and I found that Barry Blyth's catalogues hold a wealth of information as all the iris descriptions included the parentage of each. I made more crosses in 2015 and 2016. These seeds I put through the rinse and soak method to wash off the germination inhibitor in December and then put in the fridge in a bag of moist peat moss for a few months to get them germinating before planting outside in spring. I am looking forward to seeing some new seedlings bloom this year from that batch.

In 2015 the American Iris Society held their annual conference in Portland, Oregon and my older sister and I decided to go. What a wonderful trip. Everyday iris! We were in Portland for a full week. Our first day we drove to Mid-America gardens on our own. What a wonderful place. Thomas Johnson and Paul Black have amazing iris (as we all know) and seeing the guest iris beds and the retail and seedling beds was incredibly eye opening. I will go again. The arranged bus tours included were Miller's Manor, Schreiner's, Mt Pleasant, Mid-America and the optional tour of Keith Keppel's. We went on them all! Amazing!!! We also had the pleasure of meeting so many people, Barbara-Jean Jackson, Ted Baker and iris hybridizers Thomas Johnson, Paul Black, Rick Tasco, Stephanie Markham and Tim and Maria Taylor from Australia. We also were blessed to take in lectures and lessons from long standing AIS members. If you are an iris fanatic the AIS convention is the place to go! Of course this fueled the love and desire for more irises!



*Andrea in the iris beds at
Mid-America Gardens*

Well, here we are 2018 and I have been an iris addict for more 7 years now. My only problem is that I am quickly running out of planting space. As many iris fanatics will tell you, “grass is highly overrated”. I am hoping my husband will help me make a new iris bed in our yard this spring. “Bye-bye grass!” I don’t want to tell you I have over 300 named iris (my husband would probably freak) but it is true. Sadly, my Mother passed away in 2014 before she could see my first hybridized seedling bloom. I know she would be very proud of me and what I have accomplished with her beloved flower. I went above and beyond all she could have imagined. I have to laugh and smile at the iris lover I have become, carry on where the last generation left off and be satisfied with what is yet to come. The big question is though - Can I? Yes.



SDB Bluebeard's Ghost



TBs Debrennee with Stop Flirting



TB Seedlings



SDB Pussycat Pink



*Siberian
Strawberry Fair*



*TB Queen
of Angels*