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Susquehanna Iris Society Newsletter

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From the President's Desk

The first meeting of the 2010 Iris Season will be on Saturday, March 13, 2010, at our home at 1200 Trinity North Road, Wrightsville, Pa 17368. The meeting will begin at 2:00 p.m. and last until about 4:00 p.m. or so. The topic for the meeting will be planning the programs and iris shows for the 2010 year. It is very important that you come and talk about what you would like to see for programs for this year. We want to plan programs that are of interest to you, but we don't know what you are interested in unless you come and tell us. So please come to the meeting. If you are unable to come to the meeting, please let me know what you are interested in by e-mail or phone. After the planning meeting, we will all enjoy some Penn State Creamery Ice Cream.

The next newsletter in April will include an updated Calendar of Events for 2010.

With this newsletter is a Susquehanna Iris Society (SIS) Membership Form. If you have already filled out the form, thank you very much. If you did not fill out the form in the last newsletter, please do so in this newsletter so that the SIS membership is up-to-date. Hopefully, the instructions for the form are clear, but if there are questions, please let me know.

If you have any concerns about the SIS meeting, please let me know. Hope to see you on March 13.

Featured Iris



Picture by Jay Holcomb

Iris Dividing Line (MTB)

This was hybridized by Bunnell and introduced in 2004. Nice lavender-blue with a distinctive line down the center of the fall. It has been growing well in my garden. It was the best Miniature Tall Bearded iris at the Tall Bearded Iris Show on May 23, 2009.



Shirabyoshi
From Ensata Gardens

Iris pseudata—what is it?

by Jay Holcomb

I had heard of this type of iris, but was not really sure what it was until I saw the article in the October, 2009 issue of the Bulletin of the American Iris Society. Jill Copeland wrote an article on *Iris pseudata* and that article is the basis of most of this article. Another name for this iris is “eye shadow” iris. These are basically a cross between *Iris pseudacorus* and *Iris ensata*. The cross is a little difficult to get good seeds and good plants because *I. pseudacorus* generally has 34 chromosomes while *I. ensata* has 24. When you cross species with different number of chromosomes, generally you get sterile plants so it is tough to continue a breeding program. Jill talks about how she has done it in her article.

I. pseudacorus generally is yellow and moving toward cream, but the *I. ensata* comes in the rest of the iris colors. The best place to get an idea of what they look like is the Ensata Garden website and the paragraph below is from that website. The photos on the website give you a good look at what is available.

“Great advances have recently been made in hybridizing *Iris pseudacorus* with Japanese iris in the pursuit of getting yellow pigment into a Japanese iris form. Yellow has been achieved and some fantastic Eye Shadow signal patterns emerged. These new pseudata iris are hardy to Zone 4 (maybe 3), vigorous growers, especially when grown in or near water (growing up to 5’ tall) and adapt to garden conditions (growing up to 3’ tall). They have 3-4 branches and 10-16 buds, clumps remain in bloom about 3 weeks once established. These new iris are sterile hybrids and will not spread into waterways.” (From Ensata Website <http://www.ensata.com/HTML/PlantPages/Pseudatas.htm>).

The culture of pseudatas is not too difficult. They are hardy in zone 4 and Pennsylvania is in zone 5 or higher so they are hardy in our area. Because of the *I. pseudacorus* background, they will grow well and up to 5’ tall near a stream. In normal garden, soil they usually get to be 3-4’ tall. Also because of the *I. pseudacorus* parent, the pH of the soil is probably not as important. Although I have not seen specific recommendations, I would assume that a fertilization program used for Japanese iris would be fine for pseudatas and if the pH was around 7.0 or lower, the pseudatas would do fine. The Ensata website says they generally have 3-4 branches and 10-16 buds which gives them a fairly long flowering time of up to 3 weeks. The flowering time should be about the same as Japanese or perhaps a little earlier.

Jill Copeland makes the point that pseudatas, at this point, all have 3 falls pretty much like the *I. pseudacorus*. With continued breeding, the form of the pseudatas may change. At the moment, the “eye shadow” pattern is rather unique and the colors are very nice so the pseudatas would make a very nice addition to your garden.

Tentative Calendar of Events for 2010

Date	Time	Event
March 13	2:00 pm	Program planning meeting and ice cream social at our house in Wrightsville, PA
April	2:00 pm	Meeting and program at our house in Wrightsville, PA
May		Bearded Iris Show
June		Beardless Iris Show
July		Rhizome Sale
August		Picnic
September	2:00 pm	Meeting and program
October	2:00 pm	Meeting and program
November	Noon	End of Season Dinner Meeting

Susquehanna Iris Society Membership Form

All AIS and SIS members: If you have not already done so, please return this form by February 28, 2010 to Jay Holcomb, 1200 Trinity North Road, Wrightsville, PA 17368 or email to jayh530@comcast.net

Name _____ Address _____

City/State/Zip _____ Phone _____

E-mail address: _____

Future newsletters will be sent to members via Internet who have an e-mail address.

Member of the American Iris Society (AIS) _____ Yes _____ No (**Website: www.irises.org**)

If you are a member of the American Iris Society, your AIS dues will cover your SIS dues.

If you are not an AIS member and wish only to be a member of the Susquehanna Iris Society (SIS), there will be annual dues of \$5.00 per family. The dues will be due in February for the calendar year.

I wish to be a member of SIS **only**: _____ Yes

Enclosed is the \$5.00 membership fee. Make check payable to the Susquehanna Iris Society and mail to Jay Holcomb at above address.

I wish to have my name on a distributed SIS membership list _____ Yes _____ No.

Special Article

Growing Siberian Iris

by Jay Holcomb

I am always interested in the topic of how to grow iris so I thought I would share some of my ideas about how I grow Siberian Iris. My first comment would be that if your Siberian Iris are growing fine, then you are growing them correctly and don't change what you are doing. "If it isn't broke, don't fix it". If your Siberians are not doing as well as you think they could, maybe something here will be helpful. The most authoritative book on Siberians is "The Siberian Iris" by Currier McEwen, and, if you are interested in Siberians, it is an excellent book to read.

For me, the Siberian Iris make a good plant for a perennial border. That means that Siberians will grow very well with other perennials in a perennial border or a flower garden. The tall bearded irises don't seem to do as well as a border plant as the Siberians do. In general, Siberians do not seem to have many insect and disease problems, which is a good reason for them to grow well in the perennial border. Iris Borer can attack Siberians, as all other iris, so a spring treatment for borer seems to solve the problem for the season. Pennsylvania is a good climate for Siberians. Siberians are very cold hardy so even in the coldest parts of PA, they are perfectly hardy. The Siberians do not do as well in the southern US because of the hot summers, but the summers in PA are fine as long as the Siberians get enough water.

The general recommendation for irrigation of Siberians is 1" of water a week for good growth. Once the irises are established, they will tolerate some drought so that only during a rather severe drought would they need to be watered. If it is really dry, I will water mine, but I don't do it very regularly. Siberians grow best with a constant supply of water, but they will not tolerate water over the rhizomes for very long. If you have a low spot where water sits for an extended period of time, don't plant your Siberians there. Siberians do look nice near water as long as the rhizomes are not under

water. As is typical with other iris, Siberians need full sun. They will flower with half a day of sun, but less than that and they will not grow and flower very well.

Siberians cannot be dried out for shipment and transplanting so that affects when and how to transplant your Siberians. Most commercial gardens will ship Siberians in late summer or early fall and they can be planted then, but they must get rooted in very well so that they don't frost heave during the freezing and thawing of winter. Once I planted some in the fall and was walking around the garden in very early spring or late winter and found the Siberian rhizomes lying on the ground. The next year, I planted the fall shipped Siberians in a pot and overwintered them in pots heavily mulched so that they would not heave out of the ground. Once spring arrived, the potted Siberians were planted, and they grew well. If you are moving Siberians from one part of your garden to another, I think that spring is the best time to do it. Some people even move them at other times, but if you do that, care in watering is even more important.

For me, organic mulch makes sense for Siberians. The organic mulch helps to keep the soil uniformly moist, which the Siberians like. As it breaks down, it adds organic matter and a few nutrients. There are many organic types of mulch out there, but I use hardwood bark mulch. The cost is reasonable, it is easy to use and very easy to get either in bags or in bulk. The mulch also helps to control the weeds so it helps to reduce the time you actually work in the garden.

It seems that fertilization of Siberians has had less research. Most Siberians will survive and perhaps grow with little or no fertilization. If you want the Siberians to grow and flower well, fertilization is necessary. You can use either soluble or granular fertilizer. I prefer to use granular fertilizer with an analysis of 10-10-10 or 5-10-10 and apply it early in the spring. The rate to use is not as clear. The recommendation that I have seen is a handful for each plant. I am not really sure how much that is or what size plant. A better recommendation is 1-2 tablespoons of granular fertilizer for each plant. This spring I will try to figure out how much

fertilizer I actually use for each plant. There is a recommendation to fertilize again after flowering. Generally, I don't fertilize after flowering since I don't consistently add water to keep the plants growing during the summer. This discussion on fertilization should give you the feeling that more information on fertilization is needed so if you have any comments, please let me know.

The last thing to do in the gardening year is to cut the foliage back almost to the ground. This

can happen in late September or October once the foliage starts to turn yellow. That is the signal that the iris are done growing for the year and that the foliage can be cut back. Cut back the foliage and discard it so that pests do not overwinter on the foliage.

This is a short commentary on Siberian Iris, and I would welcome anyone who would like to add comments on Siberians.

2010 AIS National Convention May 31st to June 5th, 2010

Sponsored by the Madison Area Iris Society (madisoniris.org)

Convention Headquarters:

Madison Marriott West
1313 John Q. Hammons Drive
Middleton, WI 58562
Phone: 608-831-2000; Toll free 888-745-3032



<http://www.madisoniris.org/Convention/Welcome.htm>

**The best gift of the garden
is the restoration of the 5 senses.**

Hanna Rion