Susquehanna Iris Society Newsletter

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Editor: Jay Holcomb

From the President's Desk

This is the first of what I hope will be quarterly newsletters from the Susquehanna Iris Society. Each newsletter will have a "President's Desk" column, which will give me an opportunity to let the Society know what is going on as well as some things that I have found interesting.

Important!

We will have a booth at the Garden Expo in Harrisburg on March 6-9, 2008, and we need people to staff the booth. Please contact Harold Griffie (phone 717-677-7818 or e-mail hgriffie18@yahoo.com) and let him know when you will be able to help. He will also need help for set up and tear down.

In the newsletter will be the following:

- "**SIS Chatter**". This column is for any member of the Society to talk about any issue that they wish to cover. This is my invitation to you to sit down and write something for the column and submit it to me. If someone writes a lengthy contribution, then there may only be one person contributing to the column in that issue. If several people have short contributions, then there will be several different topics in the column for that issue. The nature of the topics will be whatever you write and send in.
- **"Up Coming Events**". I will try to have events planned early enough so you will know when an event will occur.
- "**Featured Iris".** This column will feature an iris including a photo or 2 and a little background on the iris and why it is important enough to feature. This is another column to which you may contribute. If no one contributes, you may see what I think is important.
- **"Ask the Expert**". I will collect the questions, but I am not the expert. I will find someone who is capable of answering the questions, and the question and answer will be printed in each newsletter if I have questions.
- **"Special Articles"** as they become available.

SIS Chatter

I ran across an interesting article in Tall Talk for Fall of 2007. Phil Williams wrote an article titled Thinning vs. Transplanting. He talked about visiting Evelyn Kegerise's garden, observing bountiful flowering, and finding it was because Evelyn thinned her iris rather than lift and divide every second or third year. The benefit was that there was bountiful flowering every year since there was never a time when the bed had just been replanted. This was very interesting to me since I was completely unaware of this practice. Is there anyone in SIS who practices or has practiced this thinning technique who would be willing to share it with the rest of the Society? If thinning will give you excellent flowering every year, it seems that those with small back yard gardens would benefit by having good flowering every year. I am interested in trying this technique since it also sounds as if it will be a little less work. Maybe it will just spread the work out over more of the summer rather then do it all at one time. At any rate, I am interested in trying it so if anyone can provide guidance, I would be very appreciative.

Special Article

Dwarf Irises as Potted Plants

E. Jay Holcomb
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Abstract

Today's market is looking for new potted plants. Dwarf bearded iris are naturally short and have showy flowers, so seem to have potential as a new flowering potted plant. The objective was to determine the correct day length and chilling to produce flowering out of season. Some dwarf iris flowered without chilling but best flowering was achieved with 4 to 8 weeks at 3-4°C. Most flowered slowly or not at all under short days unless they had been chilled. Plants grown under supplementary high intensity discharge (HID) lighting flowered earlier and were better quality than plants grown under natural day lengths.

Introduction

The irises (*Iris pumila*) used in this study were the standard dwarf type that attain a height of 20 - 35 cm, thus attain a suitable height for the 15 cm pot that is commonly found in today's pot plant market. The two cultivars were ‘Laced Lemonade’ and ‘Saphire Gem’.

The objective of this research was to describe how day length and temperature would influence flowering of dwarf iris. Early studies on day length of tall bearded irises done by McGarvey (1963) indicated that a 24-hour photoperiod induced continued flowering of remontant (reblooming) types of bearded irises. Preston and coworkers (1983) carried out experiments to determine the effects of duration of cold treatment on the greenhouse forcing of tall bearded irises. They used three cultivars Babbling Brook, Cayenne Capers, and Stepping Out, and found that days to flowering were affected by the chilling period. As the duration of chilling increased from 9 to 18 weeks, there was a significant linear decrease in the number of days to reach flowering. No research on dwarf iris was found.

Results and Discussion

Plants that had not been chilled and were grown under short days did not flower. If the rhizomes were chilled for 8 weeks, flowering was complete. Plants that were grown under HID lighting flowered regardless of chilling except, 'Saphire Gem' did not completely flower when the plants were not chilled.

Day length had a significant effect on number of flower stems per pot for 'Laced Lemonade' and to a lesser extent for 'Saphire Gem'. The HID treatment plants usually had a higher number of flower stems per pot compared to the long day length treatment and the short day length for a given chilling time.

Inflorescence height was an important characteristic of pot plants. The tallest plants were grown in the HID lighting treatment while the long day plants were shorter. The short day plants did not flower so a stem length could not be measured. Chilling time did not affect flower stem length for 'Laced Lemonade'.

For 'Saphire Gem’ an increase in chilling time resulted in a greater inflorescence height. ‘Saphire Gem' cooled for 8 weeks had the longest flower stems.

In summary, dwarf bearded iris that are lifted in August and planted in the greenhouse in the fall can be forced into flower. In general, the rhizomes should be given a cooling period of 6 to 8 weeks, and will force best with HID lighting, but long day lighting is also acceptable. Generally, the height of forced plants is appropriate, but the number of flowers needs to be increased.

Literature Cited

McGarvey, W.G. 1963. Photoperiodism of Irises. Bull. Amer. Iris Society 170:31-34.

Preston, M.A.S., J.W. Buxton, R.G. Anderson, and H.C. Mohr. 1983. Effects of vernalization duration and storage method on forcing of tall bearded iris. HortScience 18(4):455-456.

Calendar of Events for 2008

Date	Time	Event
March 6-9	**10 am-8 pm**	**Staff booth at Garden Expo at the Farm Show Building**
***March 15**	**2:00 pm**	**Meeting and ice cream social at our house in Wrightsville, PA**
***April 26**	**2:00 pm**	**Meeting and program at our house in Wrightsville, PA**
May 24		**Tall Bearded Show at West Manchester Mall**
June 21		**Beardless Show at West Manchester Mall**
July 12		**Rhizome Sale at West Manchester Mall**
August		**Picnic**
***September 20**	**2:00 pm**	**Meeting and program at our house in Wrightsville, PA**
***October 18**	**2:00 pm**	**Meeting and program at our house in Wrightsville, PA**
November	**Noon**	**End of Season Dinner Meeting**

***Meeting dates are subject to change as necessary.**

Featured Iris:

'Grape Fizz' is a very nice Japanese Iris and has done very well in my garden. The purple color with the light lavender splashes certainly does remind me of grape fizz. The culture for 'Grape Fizz' is similar to other Japanese Iris. It does well with an acid soil and annual fertilization. It does well with good moisture, but has done well in my normal garden soil. As with other iris, the iris borer must be controlled. If you have not tried 'Grape Fizz', I would recommend you try it.

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