

This past May I had the pleasure of attending the AIS National Convention “Iris in Wonderland 2015” and the Siberian/Species Convention “Another Day in the Garden” hosted by the Greater Portland Iris Society, Portland, Oregon. The iris and gardens were truly spectacular. Because I was attending two different conventions which featured several of the same master plantings, I was able to see a wide variety of iris in bloom on two different occasions. The stars were the tall bearded iris but some of the beardless iris were getting noticed too. Two cultivars of *Iris versicolor* and two species-cross iris which had *Iris versicolor* in their parentage were doing well in the convention guest gardens. All four of the iris made the top three lists at the 2015 Siberian/Species Convention.

Growing up in the Southern Tier of New York State, *Iris versicolor* was our blue flag and is abundant in this area. It is a species iris found growing wild in wetlands in much of the Northeast and it’s one that I’d encourage everyone to grow. Although it thrives in wet soil, it grows well in most sunny garden situations. In the Pacific Northwest the size of the plants and amount of blooms they were producing were certainly enhanced. I guess the rich topsoil and fertilizer worked wonders. It’s nice to see that several hybridizers have had such good results involving a species iris native to the Northeast.

The first *Iris versicolor* to catch my eye was ‘More Raspberries Please’ which was a seedling from the hybridizing efforts of Rita Butler in Oregon. It has blooms in a pleasing shade of raspberry red although my digital photos enhance the blueish tinge. It made a nice clump in most of the gardens and tied for third favorite seedling.



‘More Raspberries Please’
Miller’s Manor Gardens, Canby, OR

At Chad Harris’ Mt. Pleasant Iris Farm where they receive a lot more rain, this iris had grown into a huge clump unlike the ones we saw in the other gardens. It certainly responds to a favorable environment as did the *Iris versicolor* ‘Forest Haimati’ from the gardens of Anita Moran in Maryland and introduced in 2010.

‘Forest Haimati’ which was voted second favorite species/species cross iris also made a towering and full clump at Chad Harris’ place. In the other gardens it formed small clumps but it outdid itself here. Its delicate white blooms with yellow signals were abundant on the well branched stalks. Anita selected it from seedlings grown from seed obtained from the Species Iris Group of North American (SIGNA).



‘Forest Haimati’
Mt. Pleasant Iris Farm, Washougal, WA



‘Forest Haimati’
Mt. Pleasant Iris Farm, Washougal, WA

In addition to the two *I. versicolors* there were two species cross iris from the gardens of Jill Copeland in Michigan. 'Simply Cute' is a biversata which was created by crossing *Iris versicolor* with *Iris ensata* (*Japanese Iris*) and then crossing the offspring with *Iris versicolor* giving the biversatas a "double shot" of *Iris versicolor* genes. Biversatas resemble versicolors in growth habits and make nice garden plants.

'Simply Cute' is a nice addition to this group with its reddish flowers. Jill selected it from seedlings grown from SIGNA seed 03N185. It was introduced this year by Ensata Gardens and is described in their catalog a "Diploid. Early to Midseason to Late, 20". The petals are a dark velvety red violet, deepening to deep blue in the center; ruffled styles are accented with turquoise midribs. At the convention it was selected as the third favorite iris."



'Simply Cute'

Aitken's Salmon Creek Gardens, Vancouver, WA



'Simply Cute'

Schreiner's Iris Gardens, Salem, OR

The iris selected as the favorite species/species cross iris at the convention was Jill's 'Do the Math.' I'm sure its performance in the convention gardens gave it a big edge in winning the Randolph Perry

Medal from the American Iris Society this year. In all the gardens it was in full bloom and it really formed huge clumps.



'Do The Math'

Mt. Pleasant Iris Farm, Washougal, WA

"Do The Math' was hybridized by Jill Copeland and selected from seedlings of a cross of a tetraploid *laevigata*-*versicolor* seedling and the *Iris versicolor* 'Mysterious Monique' which has very dark violet falls. 'Do The Math' was introduced by Ensata Gardens in 2008. In the 2008 Ensata catalog they state "If you want to know the number of chromosomes in this Species Cross (X) iris**Do The Math!**"

The catalog also states that it has an "Extended *versicolor* bloom season. 30-40". 2-3 branches with 8-10 buds per stalk!" It is interesting that the flower shows a white line extension of the signal which the catalog calls an added "white spear" and that some *Iris laevigata* cultivar blooms have a white line signal.



'Do The Math'

Schreiner's Iris Gardens, Salem, OR

The *Iris versicolor* and *Iris versicolor* species crosses did well at the Siberian/Species Convention. I hope you will consider giving some of them an opportunity to perform in your garden and extend your iris bloom season. You may be surprised how well they do.