

Observations and Musings In the Garden

by Dorothy Stiefel

(with added photos from the AIS TWIKI)

Bearded iris season began in my garden on May 6, 2013. The usual suspects showed: SDBs 'Princess Dorothy' (C. Palmer 1985), 'Cherry Garden' (B. Jones 1967), 'Gingerbread Man' (B. Jones 1969). The princess has been a reliable performer since I first planted her in



1991, 'Cherry Garden' even longer, and good old 'Gingerbread Man' since I was gifted with him by CNY member Helen Schueler in 1988. These irises are absolutely reliable. It's always nice to see old friends!



At left 'Cherry Garden', at right 'Gingerbread Man'.

The garden suffered a setback when we had a substantial frost the night of May 14. Flowers that opened over the next week to ten days often showed the typical "Round-Up damage" pattern of distortion which also can be caused by frost. More unfortunately, some TBs aborted their developing bloom stalks.



But the show did continue and SDB 'Lumalite' (Aitken 1995) (pictured left) was one of the next to appear. I acquired this iris in the year it was introduced and have never regretted it. It is a yellow amoena with a bit of extra color, including electric red-orange beards, and stands out in the garden like a beacon. I know there is at least one "updated" version out there, with somewhat larger flowers, but I don't feel a need to update. 'Golden Fair' (Warburton 1960), a yellow SDB with a white blaze, bloomed at

the same time. 'Barbi' (Randolph 1953) a yellow self IB, and 'Lemon Pop' (Lauer 1990) another very yellow IB followed. These are quite reliable and it seems to me that there are more reliable yellow irises than any other color. 'Lemon Pop' (pictured right) often presents flowers with 4 standards and 4 falls on the earliest blooms, but as I've grown it since 1994, it is like accepting a small fault in an old friend.



It was a special year! 'Prairie Thunder' (Black 1990), (pictured left) my sole surviving arilbred, bloomed. This was the first time since 2010. I used to have a number of arilbreds and really enjoyed them, but in the poorly-drained clay soil at my current residence they have all dwindled and died, except 'Prairie Thunder' and the disenrolled "arilbred" 'Striped Butterfly' (Noyd 1958). 'Striped Butterfly', a gorgeous light blue with prominent dark blue veins on the falls, is 1/8 onco, and did not perform this year. It only manages to bloom perhaps one in every three years, but I like it so much that it retains its place, though garden real estate is precious. I first saw a color picture of this iris on the Jan. 1963

AIS bulletin cover, and immediately started a search for a rhizome. Superstition Gardens offered it and I wasted no time acquiring it in 1997.

I have more irises with a similar poor bloom history that are so special in some way that they keep their place, although I may discard the more frequent bloomer next to it because I just plain don't like it. I can think of one new introduction that I chucked last year because I thought its proportions were terrible, although the flower was very attractive. Another iris, which had been with me for quite a while and won recognition in its time, was finally discarded because I could no longer abide the very severe leaf spot it developed every season.

But on to more good stuff! 'Apricosa' (Filardi 2010), unfortunately suffered frost damage on the top bloom, but subsequently opened fine flowers. From a distance it appears to be an apricot amoena, but upon closer examination, one sees a very pretty concoction of apricot, lavender, white and pink. The beard is also a combination; light blue and orange. It has healthy foliage and is increasing well.



I was pleasantly surprised to see that 'Raspberry Blush' (Hamblen 1976) (*pictured left*), IB, a very pretty pink and raspberry pink/violet legacy from my Mother's garden, had finally made a small clump and was blooming profusely. This is an iris that struggled here for years. I moved it (again!) two years ago, augmenting the clay with **lots** of peat moss, and it has responded well. I am glad I did not give up.

Speaking of raspberry, 'Raspberry Jewelry' (A.&D. Cadd 2001) TB, is another blended raspberry and pink gem with a most entrancing glittery violet sheen on the falls. It also performed beautifully this season. 'Circus Circus' (G. Sutton 1997) (*pictured right*) is one of my favorites. Normally I am not much attracted to purple on white plicatas (we have seen so many of them!), but this one is very early to bloom, always blooms, and multiplies like a 21 and it outperforms 90% of the TBs I have grown. After George Sutton's recent demise, I think of him and consider this iris a fine legacy.



One of the few irises that rank up along with 'Circus Circus' is good ol' TB 'Vanity' (Hager 1975) (*pictured left*). This light pink self is a Dykes Medal winner that indeed deserves it. Other TB notables



in my garden: pink self 'Native Dancer', (Fay 1954), light blue on white plicata 'Blue Shimmer', (J. Sass 1941), and light yellow with white area under beard 'Lemon Meringue' (Noyd 1957). Quaker Lady (Farr 1909) (*pictured left*), registered as a TB, but short by modern standards, is a color I find impossible to describe (sort of a pink/beige/gray/lavender blend). It is also a garden stand-out, and "garden-ability" is normally my no. 1 criteria for choosing an iris to take up residence at my place, with the exception noted earlier. If a plant will not bloom in a regular fashion, it doesn't matter how great the flower is.

You will note that most of these irises are old. I find that as often as not, an iris coming to me from another climate will take 3 years to bloom. There are exceptions, of course. Once I've seen it, it takes more years to determine whether it has the "right stuff" to multiply and bloom yearly. This stacks the deck in favor of the older ones.

I have iris 'M.S.' (2005) which I acquired in 2010. It bloomed for the first time this year. What a knockout flower! But I still need to know how it will perform over the years. Similarly, I received iris 'C.S.' (2010) in the year it was introduced. It also required 3 years to produce the first bloom stalk, with a very attractive stalk and flower. But there is no sign of increase on that one rhizome, and I fear

it will bloom out. It's a shame, as it is very nice, and different than anything else I grow, but here is Mother Nature doing the selection process for me. 'C.S.' became eligible for the HM award in 2012!

Well, that is the end of musings and observations, as I see I am getting dangerously close to climbing on my soapbox and ranting about the timeframe for AIS awards and how it ill serves northern gardeners. (Did I say that!?)