



NLIS In Review – Update, 2006

By Barbara-Jean (B.J.) Jackson,
(on behalf of the Organizing Committee)

Here it is! After first coming into existence four years ago, after promising since that first year that it was coming, it is finally here; the very first issue of the Northern Lights Iris Society's newsletter. I really hope they will be coming now on a more regular basis.

The first thing we need to do is get a name for our fledgling publication! See elsewhere in this newsletter for details of the contest to "Name That Newsletter!"

2006 has been an exciting year for the Northern Lights Iris Society. It was a year that saw a significant increase in our membership (that now sits at 25), and a reaffirmation of our existence. No one can or will ever doubt that we are here to stay!

Our annual rhizome sale had more than 60 varieties and a total of more than 250 iris rhizomes were sold. As well, inroads were made in making our group a truly prairie phenomenon with members signing up to participate from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Ontario.

We are also pleased to report that permission has been received from Brandon University to add iris to its display gardens. This was put on hold last year but through persistence and negotiation, permission was given this past summer just in time for planting. So far there are just a dozen or so varieties planted but we hope to increase those numbers through donations from members and friends in the next few years. Hopefully they will put on a great show at convocation time since anything can happen in spring on the prairies as we all know.

For 2007, plans are in the works for the development of a Society website (more on that next time), member garden visits as well as public education presentations. I have already done two so far in the early months of 2007 with a third scheduled for late April.

Other tasks the Organizing Committee has been working on is the development of a Mission Statement. This is why we exist, so we had to get it right. Here is what we came up with: "The Northern Lights Iris Society is an online group dedicated to the promotion of the genus iris in cold climates."

This brief statement tells it all. It reflects our unique character and tells exactly who we are trying to reach and what we are going to do. It will evolve over time as the group grows and changes but the basics will remain the same.

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Our next tasks will include defining exactly how we will do it. Also on the table for development are the nitty gritty of the organization of our group and its structure. This is where you come in. The Mission Statement tells us the **why** of our existence. We need you to tell us **what** you want the NLIS to be. We need you to tell us **how** you want things done and **who** you want them to be done by. All members are encouraged to write any member of the Organizing Committee with your thoughts and ideas. We really would like to make our Society the best it can be and we need your help to do it.

In order that you can get in touch, here are the members of the Organizing Committee and their contact information:

- Jennifer Bishop, jennifer@dataways.com
- El Hutchison, eleanore@mts.net
- B. J. Jackson, jacksonb@brandonu.ca
- Deb Petrie, petrie@mts.net
- Ginny Prins, inanda1@mts.net

We are all looking forward to hearing from you!

So, sit back, relax, and enjoy this, Issue 1, No. 1 of the NLIS newsletter. You made it possible and are witnessing history. Our thanks to all for making it possible, particularly Shauna Cannon in AB for developing the artwork and doing the formatting, the writers, and also to Berni Robicho in ON for providing the web space for us until ours is up and running.

There's Lilies in My Irises

By Eleanor Hutchison

I can't deny that I love irises above all other plants, but after a few years, I soon came to realize that if all I planted was irises, my garden would be basically a spring only garden. And it's a long time between springs, especially in Manitoba. Sure, there were other plants in my garden, but they also bloomed in spring.

The first lilies I ever owned were bought from a plant sale held by the old Winnipeg Horticultural Society. I got a bag of 20 'Elvis Sun,' about 15 'Red Carpet' and 10 'Apollo.' That's

when I first learned the impact of mass plantings! Over the years, I bought a few more lilies from local nurseries, but I only owned about 30 different lilies over all. It wasn't until I met some very special gardeners through a garden email group in 2001 that I finally got to see the amazingly beautiful variety of lilies in their gardens. I had to have them all. I learned to take a notepad whenever I visited their gardens. I also learned to trade irises for lilies. A new obsession was born! I now own well over 100 lilies!

Because the lilies bloom in summer, I had to buy other plants to bloom around the same time, including many new varieties of hostas and daylilies. And because lilies can also bloom into fall, I had to have even more plants to bloom with them. I can honestly say that because of those new lilies, my garden is now a well balanced garden throughout the entire gardening season, not just in spring anymore. And I've also gained some truly remarkable life-long friends...

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Note from Shauna Cannon:

I met El when I believe she had only one lily in her garden. I knew that it was just a matter of time that the lure of the lily would get her, too!



*SDB Jillaroo
Hybridized By
Ensminger, 1983
Photo:
B. J. Jackson*

*In friendship's fragrant garden,
There are flowers of every hue.
Each with its own fair beauty
And its gift of joy for you.
- Friendship's Garden*

Mistakes I have Made

By Deb Petrie

I have my sister to thank for it! First it was lilies then it was hostas and heucheras and now it is Iris. When dividing anything from her garden her standard phrase was and still is, "I don't have any more room, do you want some?" Of course I couldn't turn down a free plant and so my gardening obsessions grew.

My knowledge of iris was limited to the phrase "isn't that an iris?" Until I realized that my sister's garden had much more to look at in the spring than mine. So I set out to change that. I started doing research and listening to other gardeners that grew iris and to my surprise, I found it fascinating and confusing. There are so many types of iris out there that I decided to limit my choices to the short ones. The MDB's and SDB's seemed a good place to start. I ordered and planted quite a few that first year and was given others by friends. They settled in well and I sat back to wait for the next spring. All of them thrived and bloomed with great profusion. I didn't lose one that season. I even had excellent increase on most of them, so much that the next spring I was dividing and sharing many of them.

So what were my mistakes? For one thing I was planting them wrong! Planting depth wasn't something I paid much attention to in my research. I knew they were planted shallowly but I never checked out what that meant. It wasn't until some friends on an email list were discussing planting depth that I actually even thought about it. I started asking questions and realized that mine were planted much deeper than they should be with the rhizomes completely covered to a depth of at least 2 inches sometimes 3! This revelation came just as winter closed in and I couldn't do anything about it until spring.

Well one thing after another interfered with my plan to replant them properly that spring, and as a result another iris season went by without the plants being lifted. I was lucky! I

never lost an iris to rot in those first years, probably because those years were very dry and those irises were planted on a slight slope with excellent drainage. Every one of my improperly planted irises was eventually replanted when dividing was again necessary.

I still plant MDBs and SDBs a little too deep. Not the 2 to 3 inches of my first endeavors but approximately ½ to 1 inch deep. As hard as a try I just can't seem to expose the poor little things to the sub-zero temperatures of my zone 2b winter.

My second mistake was more costly! I started planting tall bearded iris the same way! You guessed it I lost a lot of TBs to rot that year. Some did survive and they are now planted properly with the rhizome visible at the surface of the soil.

My third mistake was premature dividing. It took a very long time for the original irises I divided to again reach bloom size and even longer to for mature clumps to form. Now when dividing I always replant at least two good sized rhizomes preferably with multiple fans to ensure survival and decent bloom the next year.

When it comes to gardening with irises or any other plant one thing I have learned from this experience is pay attention to the research you do before planting a new genus in your garden. It will save you time, money and a lot of worry. about your gardens survival!

*SDB Mikey
Likes It!
Hybridizer:
T. Aitken,
2003
Photo:
B. J. Jackson*



Name That Newsletter

Now that we have a newsletter, we need a name for it! This is your chance to be creative, so send your ideas to B. J. Jackson at jacksonb@brandonu.ca with the subject "NLIS Newsletter Name". This will ensure it doesn't get overlooked in the rush we are expecting.

If your name idea is chosen, you will win not one, not two, but three iris rhizomes to be determined in Spring 2007. Include your name and e-mail address and **why you think your name should be chosen**. This is the most important part of your entry!

You can enter as many times as you wish with as many name suggestions you can come up with. Entries must be received by **March 25** to qualify. No exceptions! The Organizing Committee will consider all entries and make the final decision. The winner will be announced in the next issue.

Did you know...

... Colors in Iris cover the painter's pallet, from reds and purples to blues, yellows, rusts, pinks, peach, cream and even black. Although the red and black of the bearded varieties are not true black and red, the black is close. There is no true green in any of the iris varieties, yet.

...Iris have special names for many of the color combination patterns?

Self – The Iris is one color.

Bi-Tone – The Iris is two shades of one color.

Bi-Color – The Iris is two colors.

Variiegata – The Iris has yellow stands and rust or red falls.

Amoena – The Iris is a bi-color but the standards are always white, with contrasting falls.

Blends – Includes the Zebra and Batik group. The colors are streaked or blended over both the stands and the falls.

Plicata – The Iris has light colored petals with dark borders.

Seed Starting 101

By B.J. Jackson

A number of people have expressed an interest in starting iris from seed. I got the bug a few years ago and have met with both success and failure. The success is that there are now 7 'babies' over-wintering outside from open pollinated seed from SDBs Jade Maid and Over Easy. I am very much looking forward to seeing their maiden blooms next spring! With that success, I tried again and this time met with dismal failure. I was very disappointed but discovered what I had done wrong and would like to share my story with you so that you avoid the same pitfalls I fell into.

I found the article on seed starting on the Canadian Iris Society website extremely helpful. With a wee bit of modification and the help of other irisarians, I have adapted the method set forward in that article (located at <http://www.cdn-iris.ca/seeds.html>) This article will chronicle this year's efforts so far. In the next issue I will complete the story with the rest of the story and hopefully the successes.

The first step was to harvest the seed. 2006 was a banner year for seed production via the bees but unfortunately none of my planned crosses produced pods. Not to be deterred I harvested the open pollinated seed as soon as the browned pods had cracked open but before the seed was spilled. This happened between the middle of August (very early) and the middle of September (a more 'normal' time for zone 3-ish). In total, 24 seed pods were harvested. Each pod was placed in an open coin envelope with the pod parent's name written on it and left to dry for about two weeks. When all pods had been dried appropriately, the pods were removed and the seeds shelled. The seed now looked various shades of brown and wisened (wrinkled). The first time I saw this I thought I had done something wrong and killed them. Experienced friends assured me this was normal and I breathed a sigh of relief. This process took me to the first weeks of October.

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I then went out and purchased the cheapest knee high panty hose I could find and a large bowl for soaking. After placing the seeds in the toe of the panty hose, all 24 bundles with tags stapled to the top cuff of the knee high were placed in the bowl with a solution of 10 parts water to one part bleach for half an hour. This water was then drained off and the bundles arranged in the toilet tank for at least two weeks of soaking. Placement in the toilet tank allows them to be immersed and rinsed in clean water many times a day (depending on your habits and that of your family). This rinsing process is required to wash away the germination inhibitors contained in the seed coat. Outdoors, this same process is accomplished by fall rains, winter snow and spring melting. This method just speeds up the process.

After three weeks soaking in this manner, the seed bundles were removed from the toilet tank and after another bleach/water rinse in the sink, were opened to have a look at the seeds. Any that were mouldy were discarded. After re-tying the bundles each was placed in an individual sandwich bag and tied with a twist tie. This is where I made the mistake last year. I used airtight zip lock bags instead of the open sandwich bags with twist ties and had not a single seed germinate. Going back to the article on the CIS website I discovered that this was crucial to successful seed growing. I'll not repeat that error again.

The final step in this part of the process was to place each of the bundles into another larger plastic bag and place the entire lot into the crisper of the fridge. This was done on November 12th and 18th. The second batch was from left over seed from 2005 that had been stored in the fridge. Nothing ventured nothing gained, I say! Periodically over the next 12 weeks they will be brought out and checked for mould and excess moisture, and if I'm lucky there may be a few germinated before they are removed from the fridge.

*To be continued
next time.....*



Photo by Shauna Cannon

Iris Friend or Foe?

By Ed Czarnecki

The iris shown in the photograph also includes a "visitor" known as the crab spider, a member of the Arachnidae family. They are called crab spiders because of their first two pairs of legs, which are held out to the side giving them (along with their flattened, angular bodies) a crab-like appearance. Similarly, like crabs, these spiders move sideways and backwards more easily than forward. Crab spiders do not build webs to capture prey, but rely on camouflage and hiding-ambush techniques to capture their meal which may include flower visitors such as butterflies, beetles, flies and the occasional honey bee.

There are over 200 species of crab spiders in North America, and they may be found in tree bark, various organic material, etc., however some species prefer to dwell in flowers and foliage and are also known as flower crab spiders. No control measures are recommended.

**Since Iris is the Greek goddess
for the Messenger of Love,
her sacred flower is considered the symbol
of communication and messages.
Greek men would often plant an iris
on the graves of their beloved women
as a tribute to the goddess Iris,
whose duty it was to take the souls
of women to the Elysian fields.**