



THE REVIEW

The Group for
Beardless Irises
Autumn 2021

Dates and Events for Centenary Celebrations

7th - 8th May A Centenary Event at RHS Wisley.

A weekend of displays, talks and demonstrations.

24th - 28th May RHS Chelsea.

A display to show some of the history of the society and the members behind the irises. Art will also feature and will include items from some special partner companies.

26th July W&MIG Summer Garden Party.

At Birtsmorton Court, nr Tewkesbury, Worcs., WR13 6JS.

This medieval, moated manor house and garden has a rich history. All are invited.

29th July Moorcroft Members Club.

A talk by Jake Croft, one of our members.

17th -18th September: A Centenary Celebration.

Stratford Manor Hotel, Stratford upon Avon. This is a very special occasion for the BIS and GBI members All will be very welcome. There will a series of four talks, covering historic irises as well as some of the developments that have occurred in iris breeding over the past 100 years. Some of our members will also be speaking and it will be the launch of the BIS centenary publication. A Centenary Gala dinner on the Saturday evening and garden visits on the Sunday.

18th October Moorcroft Factory Tour and meet the designer.

Moorcroft are creating a BIS Centenary Collection to mark this special year. It will form part of the Chelsea display and this event will also be a chance to meet the designer.

Garden visits will be a feature, so why not put some of these dates in your diary, after all how often can you celebrate a 100th birthday.

Event details are still being finalised but the key dates are above.

www.britishirissociety.org.uk

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Editor's Notes

Brita Carson

Has Covid finished with us yet, as we head for winter 2021? We are happy to forget it and get back to normal. Some small form of normal has returned and a few events went ahead this summer. We did have our day of beardless pleasure visiting Gordon and Chris Link at their Gobbett Nursery in July. You may wonder which irises would we see then but the ensatas or Japanese irises were in full bloom. Beautiful. Gordon has penned a few words and given you some ideas for starting to collect them, with easy ones first for those who have never grown them before.

Next year is the centenary of the BIS and there are many celebrations organised to take place which hopefully lots of members will be able to attend. I have to have an operation in January 2022 and it has forced me to postpone this celebration until 2023. We hope you will come here to Johnstonebridge to see the Siberian irises and do some hand pollinating. If it is wet and windy we can use the greenhouse and one of the outhouses has plenty of light. You can bring pollen if you would like to use a special one of your own or there will be pollen and I hope Siberians flowering in pots. Gordon has brought up a selection and I expect Alun will too. There are raised beds at the back of the house which have plenty of irises in them. There will be of labels for you to write on your name and what the cross is. I will need an envelope (an old padded one would be great) to send you your seeds. It will require your name and address. Do not put a stamp on it. Johnstonebridge sits about a mile from the M74, on the left if you are coming north. It is half an hour north of Carlisle and has a service station at the junction which would be an easy stopover and only five minutes from us.

Plenty of interesting articles in this edition of the *Review* and I would like to thank all those of you who have written for it and supplied photographs. As things fell into place it has ended up concentrating more on *Iris ensata* this time which is not as well known and grown as others. Apart from our Japanese iris visit. We have the winner of the Joyce Donaldson Trophy from Australia, presented to the winner of Japanese irises. Peta Ashton explains Hana-shobū, the Japanese flower, more commonly known as *Iris ensata*, or even just Japanese iris. Marwood is getting the National Collection back up and running again and Peta Ashton has written an account of these irises with their origins in Japan. The original form of spelling is used above but Hiroshi Shimizu, who is the President of the Japanese Society, has since used a more British spelling of Hanashobu which I think means it is ok for us to use it as well.

Chad Harris must be the American hybridising king of Japanese irises. He won the Payne Medal this year with 'Columbia Deep Water' and 'Dalle Whitewater' and two Awards of Merit are also his; they are all siblings from Terry Aitken's 'Night Angel' X 'Frosted Intrigue' hybrid from Bauer/Coble.

Please drop me an email if you would be interested to come in 2023.

Visit to The Gobbett Nursery Brita Carson

At the beginning of July we visited Gobbett's Nursery, not the easiest of nurseries to find but after an hour, that should have been only half an hour from where we were staying, we arrived to find everyone pleased to see us because we had the cakes!

There is retail therapy walking round clothes shops but there is better retail therapy walking round a plant nursery and this was perfect for me when I felt so deprived not looking at new plants anywhere for so long. There were plants and bushes and trees from all genera and then all the perennials you could wish for, and I was happy to explore them all. It was a good job that Gordon is so skilled at packing a car. I was concerned there wouldn't be enough room but there certainly wasn't enough for any chickens that, Julia, middle daughter, would have liked to take home. She was delighted when Chris took her round to see all their special rare breed ones. They are delightful to watch and listen to their gentle clucking before an odd sudden squawk by one of them showing annoyance at something.



Iris ensata ? ©Judi Deakin

In the sudden downpour this iris escaped having a name added to it. Does anyone remember what it is? Raindrops produce magic effects on the petals. Polytunnels are wonderful places to shelter from the rain and we certainly needed to take cover for a quick escape shortly after we started to look at the blooms. But every cloud has a silver lining of course, here, there were many more plants to drool over, while we waited for the sun to come back out.



The photo above, taken by Judi, of the group of Members from the Japanese Iris Day enjoying the iris spectacle. In the background another spectacle; *Cornus kousa* 'Schmetterling' with its pure white bracts, which I can't believe I missed. I must keep looking up as well as down. These tough shrubs and trees are wonderful to create an eye-catching background and last for weeks before ageing to all sorts of colours often in shades of pink. Ensatas are not the fussiest of irises but do prefer a soil slightly acid if possible to grow and flower well. Good soil preparation makes a big difference and is well worth the effort. Ensatas are hungry plants and welcome extra feeding throughout the year. With good cultivation wonderful clumps of cultivars are produced giving plenty of colour for a surprisingly long time.

Probably easier to get an order online from Gordon and Chris or another idea is to attend one of the many plant fairs they go to where Gordon would be delighted to bring you an order. Check online to see when and where they go.

Although it wasn't certain if we could go ahead with the visit it was very enjoyable meeting up with lots of members also keen to get out after the lockdowns. Thank you Gordon and Chris for having us.



Gordon has large clumps of Japanese irises which make a great show and some have extending flowering qualities. ©Judi Deakin



They can also be planted with a large variety of perennials especially in a damp place ©Judi Deakin

GETTING STARTED WITH ENSATAS Gordon and Chris Link

One question we are often asked when we are out at a plant fair or show and have a selection of flowering Japanese iris on display is -

“Will I be able to grow them in my soil?”

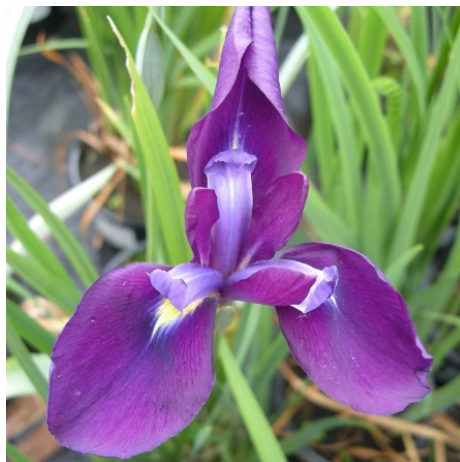
Most people are unaware of Japanese iris and are surprised that some years after starting to flower in summer, the plants are still in flower in autumn. Some are amazed by the size of the large flowered ones, while others prefer the smaller, three fall varieties.

Once we have established the perspective customer isn't gardening on sand or limestone, we can explain not to plant them on top of the soil like bearded iris rhizomes, and to please give them extra water during dry spells in spring and summer, they then become interested. We find the rhizomes must be divided by year three or four or they can begin to decline. Ensatas need to be fed with an ericaceous feed at least twice a year.

Next question is “which varieties do you recommend”. Here are half a dozen older, well-established, tried and tested varieties, which are relatively easy to find and buy to whet your appetite.

‘Kumo-no-obi’ (Yokohama Nursery, before 1910)

Deep velvety purple flowers on tall stems, one of our top selling iris on the nursery because it flowers well even in a pot.



‘Gold Bound’ (V.H. Hallock, 1885)

A 5ft tall pure white with a gold band in the centre, introduced in 1885 so has withstood the test of time and is still one of the best whites available.

Please note all photographs are © Gordon and Chris Link except ‘Pink Frost’ which is ©Alun and Jill Whitehead.

Gordon / Chris will be selling at the Centenary Event at RHS Wisley, 7th May

'Electric Rays' (Terry Aitken, R 1990)

This seedling from Terry Aitken is a relatively recent introduction in 1990 and is medium violet with light blue rays and awarded the Payne Medal in 1997. I must admit I found a group of this variety badly neglected in pots on the nursery last summer, but after a much needed divide and repot they are unrecognisable and romping away.



'Pink Frost' (Walter Marx, R.1955)

With its large pale pink to light orchid pink flowers with ruffled edges, this very pretty variety is definitely a favourite with us. Growing to about 30 inches it will make quite a large clump in a short time.



'Queen's Tiara' (unregistered)

With its three pure white falls, purple veining and purple standards, it really does stand out from the crowd. I don't know its year of introduction and as far as I know it was never registered.



'Eileen's Dream' (Bauer/Coble, R 2000)

A variety which I always think has been around forever but was only introduced in the year 2000 by Ensata gardens. A large almost velvety maroon/purple self, flowers on 90cm stems, very beautiful and a relatively long flowering season.

If you haven't already given them a go, but would like to extend your iris season by several weeks, give ensatas a try but be aware they can become addictive.

THE CROCUS COLLECTION at RHS Garden Wisley Tom King

Looking after the Crocus National Plant Collection at RHS Garden Wisley is an extremely rewarding experience and something which I have been doing for the past five years. I started at Wisley back in 2014 as a student, so when I graduated in 2016 to start working on the Alpine Team, taking on an important collection of Crocus was both daunting and exciting in equal measure! In my role as one of the four horticulturists on the Alpine Team, I look after part of the Rock Garden and about 12 different plant collections. These include Galanthus, Narcissus, Biarum, Oxalis and a summer flowering South African collection amongst others. The main role of these plant collections is to provide interest in our Alpine Display House all year round. There is always something in flower in our collections throughout the year but the peak flowering time is March to May. We have between 6000 - 7000 plants in our collections taking a huge amount of time and effort to look after them and to keep them looking beautiful.

The Crocus collection is no exception to this. There are 221 taxa (which basically means all the different names of the *Crocus*) in the collection, and includes 81 straight species and 93 cultivars. When you take into account duplicates in the collection, there are over 400 pots in total. The collection is registered with Plant Heritage to make it a National Collection. The aim of Plant Heritage is to conserve cultivated plants and preserve the rich genetic diversity held within them, potentially containing such things as disease resistance or even medicinal cures. The collection is split into four sections: the autumn flowerers, the flowers of spring, the moisture lovers and the arid lovers. The crocus are grown under cover all year round in a huge polytunnel-like structure that we call the Rovero, along with several thousand other plants.

One of the key jobs looking after the collection is watering and growing them. This means that I can control exactly how much water they get all year round which helps me to replicate their growing cycle in the wild.

The pots are also plunged into a sand plunge up to the lip of the pot with good



contact between the pot and the sand all the way around. To understand how I water the crocus, we first need to understand how a sand plunge works. The pots that the crocus are grown in are all made of terracotta, which is permeable to water. This in turn allows water to move between the growing media inside the pots and the sand plunge itself. For example, I can just water the pots and the dry sand will slowly pull the water out of the pot or I can just water the plunge and the water will slowly seep into the pots.

Alternatively, I can water both the pots and the plunge at the same time and this keeps both wetter for longer. Plants grown in pots always have a small water table held at the bottom of the pot and to my knowledge, a sand plunge is the only way of wicking this water out completely, which is much more effective than disproven methods such as crocs in the bottom of pots.



However, for this method to work the sand must be in full contact with the pot as the water will not jump across any air gaps. This is extremely helpful when plants are quite prone to rotting but still need a good drink from time to time. Sand plunges also help to keep the temperature around the roots cool in the summer, which means less watering and also keeps the temperature relatively constant in the winter, helping to stop the roots from freezing. The Rovero structure they are kept in is not heated, which is fine since crocus are generally hardy, however below -3 degrees they can be damaged, so the sand plunge helps avoid the result of frost.

From September, I start to bring the crocus out of dormancy by soaking the pots and the plunge, leaving it a week, then repeat. After this, I generally wait until growth starts appearing in the pot before watering again. If I think that they need a bit more moisture to start growing, I can water the plunge around the pots but I will not water the pots again directly until I see growth appear since I don't want to risk rotting the corms off. Generally, from the beginning of September, I will bring the autumn flowerers, the moisture lovers and the arid lovers out of dormancy, then wait till the end of September to bring the spring flowerers out. These dates don't have to be exact, they are just a rough guide. Once the plants are in full growth, they are watered approximately once a week but this varies depending on time of year and what the weather is doing. The autumn flowerers start flowering from about October to December and the spring flowerers start in January until

March, so the weather when the collection is growing is generally cool and cloudy. Interestingly, the autumn flowering section will flower first then produce the leaves whereas it is the opposite for the spring flowerers.

Once the leaves are showing or the flower buds have appeared, I start to feed the plants using a high potassium liquid feed for bulbs. For those interested, the name is 'Peter's Excel Water Soluble Fertilizer' and the NPK ratio is 13 parts Nitrogen, 5 parts Phosphorus and 20 parts Potassium. This high amount of Potassium helps to encourage strong flowering as well as bringing a range of other benefits to the plants. The plants are fed at the same time as watering using a machine called a



Dosatron, which mixes the liquid feed into the water at a dilution rate of our choosing. Throughout the season, the plants are watered and fed in this way until about April when the plants will start to go dormant. At first, I will reduce the watering down to a lower frequency and by this time, the leaves usually start to go brown and die back. By about mid-May, the crocus should be completely dormant and at this point I reduce the watering right down because most crocus need a long, hot, dry rest in the summer. For this dormancy period, I will not water the pots at all until they are brought out of dormancy again in September. Instead, I only water the plunge around the pots at varying frequencies to stop the corms from desiccating. It is usually about once a month to once every three months and I make sure that the plunge has dried out completely before I water it again.

Another large part of caring for the collection is repotting the crocus which is done from June to August when the plants are dormant. This job can take many weeks depending on how much help I have and how many days a week I can repot. The reasons we repot are to replenish the growing media and to inspect the corms for any pests or diseases. I repot the crocus every year to keep track of any losses to the collection, as I need to send an annual summary of the Crocus to Plant Heritage but otherwise this could be done biannually. When repotting, it also allows me the chance to stop the pots becoming too congested and reorganise the corms in the pot to ensure they have space to grow. At the same time, if the corms have not done so well and a few have died, then I can down size the pot to help ensure they do not get overwatered.

The Crocus National Collection is not just restricted to the collection behind the scenes in the Alpine Yard. It also includes some of the crocus that are found in the garden itself at Wisley. This includes the spring flowering *Crocus tommasinianus* and *C. vernus* and the autumn flowering *C. speciosus*, all of which have naturalised in the alpine meadow and give magnificent shows at varying times in the year. At Wisley, we also have the Conifer Lawn, which was first planted up with crocus five years ago and has been added to in successive years. The crocus planted in the lawn are the cultivars 'Pickwick', 'Jeanne d'Arc' and 'Flower Record' which are arranged in large drifts throughout the area. There is also a large drift of crocus at the back of our Rose Garden which includes the cultivars listed above but also contains *C. x luteus* 'Golden Yellow'. This area was first planted 8 years ago but was significantly bulked up 3 years ago to give the impressive display that you see today. Crocus, at times, may be challenging to look after but for me they produce some of the finest flowers that plants have to offer and can bring joy in abundance for anyone willing to take the time to delve into their world.



An impressive sight of *Crocus* in flower.

Hanashobu — a flower of season and ceremony



Horikiri no Hana-shobū no. 64 from
Series - One Hundred Famous Views of Edo, by Utagawa Hiroshige, 1857
(Woodcut Print).

Revival of the National Collection of *Iris ensata* at Marwood Hill Gardens

Peta Ashton

Marwood Hill Gardens in North Devon holds an eclectic and fascinating collection of exotic and native trees, shrubs and perennials. They were created in the 1950s by plant finder, Dr James Smart (VMH) and was a culmination of research following extensive travels in North America and Australia. A result of one of these travels was an interest in the particular beauty of the *Iris ensata* and its association with Japanese culture, and led to Marwood's first National Collection which was instated in 1990.

Iris ensata, or, to give it a colloquial and rightful name, 'Hana-shobū', is one of three varieties of iris native to Japan. Hana-ayame (*Iris sanguinea*) and Kakitsubata (*Iris laevigata*) are the others. Hana-shobū is a shallow water loving iris still found in its wild state in the bogs and marshlands of Eastern Asia. The greatest range of natural variants of this graceful, wild, purple, and violet iris occur in the Japanese islands and the people of Japan have worked with the plant's subtle diversity to create distinctive styles that have been cherished for centuries.

Hana-shobū are immersed in Japanese culture and steeped in ancient symbolism and tradition. Originally used as sentinels by farmers to show the start of the rainy season and the time to plant the staple rice crop, this iris has gone on to be the most cultivated iris in Japan. The oldest written record of it is a fifteenth century account of wild hana-shobū being brought from the northern expanse of the Asaka marshes to one of the principal gardens engaged in its cultivation at the time. (Hirao S. 1973, p26). Festivals have been created around it. The fragility of the bloom and evanescence link it intrinsically to the culture of 'The Four Seasons' in which the Japanese celebrate and interpret the passing of seasons as a metaphor for life. Slender stemmed, beardless, and beautifully inscribed with intricate ink-work, hana-shobū symbolise and represent elegance in Japan, and in the Japanese form of the 'Language of Flowers', ('Hanakotoba' in Japanese), hana-shobū mean 'happy news' or 'gentle heart'.

The beauty and simplicity of this iris flower is embedded in Japanese art work. It has inspired Japanese playwrights, poets, and artists alike. The book *Shugyobushu* by Jien (1155-1225) includes a poem that "appears to be the oldest written description of Japanese irises in the wild" (McEwen, C. 1990, p1). Utagawa Hiroshige's '*One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*', created as a series of wood cut prints between 1856-1858, is probably one of the most familiar depictions of the Japanese aesthetic appreciation of nature. It includes the print *Horikiri no Hana-shobū* (Irises at Horikiri) and this, of itself, shows the high regard and status of this iris.

Interestingly, the Japanese classify hana-shobū by geographic region; each area representing the location of gardens that were influential in their

original cultivation. The old regional demarcations still stand today. The Ise (now known as the Mie Prefecture), the Edo (Tokyo), and Higo (Kumamoto Prefecture) denote the three key distinctive styles of hana-shobū. The singular styles of the ancient varieties appear to be the hallmark of the iris's original identity and show just how important each region's individual gardens were in the iris evolution.

The Edo irises reflect the oldest hana-shobū cultivars that were grown in fields and paddies around Tokyo during the relative stability of the Tokugawa Era (or Edo period) and Meiji Restoration. They are simpler than those of the Higo and Ise styles and "may be likened in their smart, sophisticated air to the merchant culture that dominated that city for so long" (Hirao, S. 1973, p28). The man acclaimed to have had the greatest influence on the art of hana-shobū cultivation during this period was Matsudaira Shōo (1773-1856). His work perhaps epitomises the aesthetic appreciation of this iris. Hirao quotes him: "The iris is properly speaking a single bloom, and a good single iris cannot be beaten. Flowers with six petals or more are striking, but they lack the dignity of the single variety" (Hirao, S. 1973, p27).

The Higo hana-shobū were cultivated in an old province in the southern island of Kyushu, and originate from selected forms of the Edo iris. Hirao likens them "to the solemn dignity of a daimyo" (Hirao, S. 1973, p28).

The Ise iris shows considerable differences to the others. Cultivated in the Ise-Matsuzaka district of central Honshū and the site of The Grand Shrines dedicated to the ancestors of the Imperial Family, they are associated with being feminine and selected for their delicate grace, soft colouring and absence of sharp contrasts and bold patterns (Hirao, S.1973, p28).

The most noted of the individual gardens dedicated to hana-shobū cultivation are in the Horikiri District of Tokyo, (Edo region). A number of them date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Examples of those that flourished are the Kotaka-en, the Musashi-en, and the Yoshino-en (Reed, G.M. 1931, p5). The fifteenth century written record of the cultivated iris referred to earlier originals from these gardens. Records also show that since the early seventeenth century the people of Horikiri were growing the wild iris for "The Four Seasons' ceremonies. This industry grew with the support and stability of the late Tokugawa Shogunate and by the early nineteenth century, highly specialised new horticultural varieties were available for cultivation. From the nineteenth century onwards, Horikiri was almost entirely devoted to the cultivation of hana-shobū and these gardens are now famous for their breeding programmes, distinct varieties and annual displays (Reed, G.M. 1931, p4).

The Kumamoto gardens (Higo region), are famed too, this time for the Kumamoto hana-shobū and the unique method of cultivating the iris in pots rather than in open fields. Located in the southeast of Japan on the island of Kyushu, it was originally owned by the Daimyo Hosokawa during the

Tokugawa Era; one of his retainers, Junnosuke Yoshida, brought cultivars of the iris from the Edo and learned the art of their cultivation directly from Matsudaira Shōo (Reed, G.M. 1931, p27).

These are just two examples of a cross-section of villages, shrines, temples and botanic gardens that specialised in the cultivation of hana-shobū during the Tokugawa Era. Those that are still in existence today are visited by thousands each year and remain an inspiration to all.

The ancient cultivars evolution to this day is not without its complexity. There appears to have been a great deal of confusion over the iris origin and name. The ambiguity evident in attempts to source the origins and interrelationships of the wild populations and their variants has led to considerable speculation.

Examples abound: just a century ago the Japanese language defined hana-shobū as hana-ayame (*Iris sanguinea*), or simply ‘ayame’, a term that also encompasses *Iris sibirica* (the Siberian iris) and appears to have been an ancient name for the wild form of *Iris kaempferi* (Hirao, S. 1973, p26).

In the West, the evolution of the iris designated name is just as revealing. McEwen, the author of the authoritative book *The Japanese Iris*, suggests “the story is an excellent example of the confusion that can be caused by taxonomic errors” (McEwen, C. 1990, p16). Just decades ago, it was thought that *Iris ensata* and *laevigata* might be the same wild species, but now they are appreciated as being quite distinct entities. From 1886 *Iris ensata* was considered *Iris kaempferi* until it was discovered to be taxonomically incorrect, and in this case, in 1985, the Society for Japanese Irises decided to add *Iris kaempferi* parenthetically to the name *Iris ensata* as an interim measure to ensure the correct name was used because the wrong botanical name was in circulation for so long, (McEwen, C. 1990, p16). McEwen also refers to a time when *Iris ensata* was placed erroneously in the Series *Ensatae*. To this day, taxonomical reference remains obscure with people still using the names *Iris ensata*, *laevigata* or *kaempferi* interchangeably

It seems classification can be made in several ways. In Japan hana-shobū remain classified as the Edo, Ise and Higo varieties, but even here, Hirao concedes “the division into these groups does not in practice mean that a strict dividing line can always be drawn between them” (Hirao, S. 1973, p25). Thankfully for us, the plant is now regarded as belonging to the botanical species *Iris ensata*, and placed in the Series *Laevigatae*.

The story is perhaps an example of the intricacy of botanical transculturation. Whatever the iris true designation, its history perhaps shows that the Japanese culture and ethos underpin this iris’ intended cultivation, and this, in turn, informs on the identity and true nature. Shūchi Hirao mentions “The breeding activities of Japan have always differed from those of gardeners in the West in seeking, not so much to obtain new cultivated varieties by

crossing different species, as to follow up a variation within a particular species by gathering the seeds from natural variants in the countryside, and sowing them in the hope of obtaining still more unusual results” (Hirao, S. 1973, p26). With global interest, the onset of intra and inter-specific hybridisation, selective breeding could be said to have shrouded the delicate stature and original identity of this iris (Boyd, P.D.A. 2017, p2). Tracing the hana-shobū back to the original Japanese cultivars with their unambiguous, simple forms will be an interesting conservation project and an exciting challenge.

In its day, the National Collection at Marwood had over 300 cultivars of hana-shobū on display in the garden’s extensive bog-side planting which cut right through the heart of the garden. The original collection focused largely on the vast number of descendants of the old Japanese varieties and only a few of the original cultivars with their distinct styles were held. The collection has diminished now and retains a provisional status. We would like to bring it back in a different guise; this time focusing on the ancient Japanese strains with a view to conserving this iris’ original identity in its true context; a Japanese phenomenon centred around flowers of season and ceremony.

These are just the first tenuous steps towards the National Collection’s revival. The above has been researched in depth but the subject is still very new to us. Comments are most welcome and we acknowledge that changes to the content of this article may be necessary with your contributions.

If anyone can help with ideas of where to source the true Japanese cultivars, track back the provenance of those with unclear lineage, know of contacts in Japan who can help, or even speak Japanese, please do email us. If you have plants in your garden that may be of interest, we would love to hear from you.

Email: info@marwoodhillgarden.co.uk

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News from Australia



Iris ensata 'Our Diana'

Michael Barnes

This year's winner of the Joyce Donaldson Medal for the best new *Ensata* seedling in NSW, Australia is 'Our Diana', exhibited by Barbara Levy from seed provided by Hiroshi Shimizu, Japan. The trial gardens are at the Everglades, a National Trust House in Leura, in the Blue Mountains outside Sydney. The garden was designed by European/Australian garden designer Paul Sorensen and it was believed to have included *Ensatas* when it was designed in the 1920s.

Glass Flowers

Jill Whitehead

It all started with a visit to the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew to see the exhibition of Dale Chihuly's glass sculptures. I had missed his previous exhibition in 2005 and was determined not to miss this one. I was enthralled, not only by what seemed to be unrestrained bursts of colour but by the sheer variety of the sculptures, some more appealing than others. But what surprised me is that I found some were so graceful and yet vibrant: of course, the light shining through was also magical. This set me thinking about any exhibitions of other glass flowers and of course the second question, "are there any irises portrayed in this art form?" Then I came across a piece in a 1992 RHS *The Garden* magazine. This had a short article entitled "Crystal Collection" with the subtitle "an amazing herbarium of botanically accurate models of flowers, fungi and ferns all fashioned from glass" and it had an iris.

The collection in question is held at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and is known as "The Ware Collection of Blaschka Glass models of Plants" but is better known as the Glass Flowers. It is an important resource within the museum. The Glass Flowers were commissioned by George Lincoln Goodale who was the founding director of the Botanical Museum. He was looking for a way to bring flowers to life, an exhibit that could introduce students to plant structure, i.e. more than the two-dimensional botanic drawings or pressed specimens could offer. Goodale came across the Blaschka invertebrate models and was convinced that plants could be represented in the same way. The father and son team, Leopold and Rudolph, took some convincing but eventually agreed. Unfortunately, the first shipment was damaged by the customs officers but even the damaged items convinced Goodale that he was on the right track. He set about getting funding and a past student of Goodale's, Mary Lee Ware, along with her mother, provided the funding necessary to order more models. They were inspired by even the broken flowers, which says a great deal for the quality and reality. Hence the Ware Collection.

The Blaschka family glass working tradition had been passed down through the generations. Leopold Blaschka (1822 - 1885) joined his father in the business which was then in Bohemia, now part of the Czech Republic. The business focused on costume jewellery, glassware for laboratories and glass eyes! After his son Rudolf was born in 1857, Leopold moved with his wife, Caroline, to Dresden and eventually Rudolf joined his father in the family business. Leopold, by this stage, had begun to make glass invertebrates which were used by museums. However, both father and son were inspired by nature and spent many hours closely looking and observing the minute details of many natural objects. After a visit to the USA, Leopold first started making glass flowers for his own enjoyment. Once inspired, it seems that there was no stopping him, and he worked extensively on glass flowers but always for his own pleasure. After Goodale convinced Leopold to make glass flowers for the museum, father and son worked on both the flowers and the



The Blaschka family with Rudolf, right.



invertebrates for part of each year. But it didn't work out, being too difficult to try to do both and in 1890, they eventually agreed to concentrate on the flowers. Leopold wrote that people thought they had a magic way of making these flowers, but that was not the case. It was a skill that increased with each generation; it was in the genes.

Fortunately, the Ware family kept up their financial support, covering all related expenses. Mary Lee Ware became friends with Rudolf and his wife, Frieda, keeping up a correspondence and stayed with them on some of her visits to Dresden. The collection was completed over a fifty-year period, finishing in 1936, and has 4,300 glass models; although not all are flowers as fungi and algae are also represented. The work achieved by them was phenomenal, especially as they did not have apprentices. For example in 1891, 731 models of plants were made representing 124 plant species. All are accurate to the tiniest detail and are life size. It is not just the time to create the model but also the time to create the initial pencil drawings, noting the tiniest detail, the shape of the pollen for example, and they included annotated notes in order to obtain this accuracy. Rudolf continued to work in this way after his father died and it is Rudolf who created the *Iris versicolor* exhibit. The Glass Flowers were his passion and work and in 1899 he wrote:

“On every walk I take, there must be something to study of nature, it may be a plant or insect or bird or whatever, I think a man can never finish these studies and is never too old to learn from nature”.

Rudolf referred to his Glass Flowers as ‘Scientific art’ and this seems to be a fitting description. The drawings of *I. versicolor* held at the Rakow Research Library show just how he worked, and the final exhibit even details the roots of the iris. This was made by Rudolph in 1896. Just the root structure alone looks so lifelike, so true to nature, and I am not alone in that thought. It is considered as one of his masterpieces. It shows that he was dedicated to showing the plants in their natural form.

Letters from Rudolf to Mary Lee Ware show how the models were made. The Blaschka's primary technique was lampworking, in which glass is melted over a flame fed by air from foot-powered bellows. They used a copper wire armature, which really acted as the model's skeleton. Smaller parts like leaves were attached using very fine copper wire, with animal glue or fused in place with heated powdered glass. The reflective surfaces then needed to be coated so they could take the paint which was used to mimic veins, etc. Over time the raw materials changed and gradually Rudolf brought more and more of the entire production process under his personal control, eventually manufacturing his own glass and colorants. The museum has retained their old-fashioned Bohemian lamp-working table as part of the exhibit. However, Leopold was always keen to point out the patience that was needed:

“One cannot hurry glass. It will take its own time. If we try to hasten it beyond its limits, it resists and no longer obeys us. We have to humor it.”

As all the models were transported by sea, they must have been packed with extreme care and the packing alone must have taken hours and a fair bit of straw and tissue paper. After the first mishap with the flowers being broken at the custom house, they were all opened, carefully, at the Botanical Museum with a customs official present and Mary Lee also. Over time the collection has provided students with a valuable learning resource inspiring many and delighting a huge number of visitors. A very special collection.

Iris versicolor is native to eastern Canada and eastern USA, growing in moist meadows, swamps and by watercourses. It is similar to our yellow flag, *Iris pseudacorus*, tolerating similar conditions. Seed pods contain anything from 40-120 seeds per pod and can have up to nine flowers on a stem, so they are floriferous. Both these factors contribute to its wide geographical spread. Various colloquial names are used including great blue flag, northern blue flag, harlequin blue flag, or poison iris. First described by Linnaeus in 1753 and recorded in Curtis Botanical Magazine in 1787, *I. versicolor* is now believed to be a hybrid that arose naturally when glaciers advanced pushing *I. setosa* into contact with *I. virginica*. It will hybridise with other members of the *Laevigatae* series. Crosses with *I. virginica* are known as *I. x robusta*, whilst crosses with *I. laevigata* are known as *versilaevs*.

It was frequently used as a remedy for various ailments by Native Americans and also to treat wounds. Some native North American Indian tribes used the root as a protection against rattlesnakes. It was believed that, so long as the root was handled occasionally to ensure the scent permeated the person, rattlesnakes would not bite them. It was also considered by some to be a magical plant, by carrying the rhizomes you would receive financial gain!

The museum holds four other Iridaceae models:

Nemastylis coelestina, Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka, 1890.

Sisyrinchium bellum, Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka, 1894.

Tigridia pavonia, Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka, 1889.

Tigridia pringlei, Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka, 1890



We are very grateful to the “The Ware Collection of Blaschka Glass Models of Plants, Harvard University Herbaria/ Museum of Natural History ©President and Fellows of Harvard College” for kindly allowing us to use their images.



Examples of Glass Flowers Left top - *Sisyrinchium bellum*
Below - Roots of *I. versicolor*

LOST and FOUND – TWICE

The histories of *Iris versicolor* ‘Murrayana’

Judi Deakin

A beautiful pure white flower with bright yellow signal patches, *Iris versicolor* ‘Murrayana’ was first found and collected on July 4th 1935 in Newfoundland near the mouth of the Salmonier River. It was an important find as no albino form of *versicolor* had previously been documented. The collector, Andrew Murray, was the brother-in-law to the noted local amateur botanist, Mrs Agnes Marion Ayre of St. Johns. Mrs Ayre was interested and sent a specimen to M. L. Fernald, curator at the Gray Herbarium, Harvard, and a piece of the root to a friend in the UK.

Fernald announced the discovery in Volume 38 of *Rhodora* (the journal of the New England Botanical Club), writing “It is interesting to receive a specimen of a complete albino *I. versicolor* from a colony of about a dozen plants.”

This form may be called *Iris versicolor* L., forma *murrayana*, f. nov., *floribus albidis, sepalis petalisque basin versus lutescentibus*.

By the end of the century, it would seem that ‘Murrayana’ had disappeared from its original habitat; at least Todd Boland of the Memorial University of Newfoundland Botanical Garden searched far and wide for a white *versicolor* and couldn’t find one. Fortunately, the piece of root sent to the UK thrived and with the generosity of gardeners everywhere, its progeny found their way around the world, including making the journey back across the Atlantic. Todd Boland learned the story of ‘Murrayana’ from the Vice-President of the BIS in the first years of the 21st century and eventually discovered that the form was available commercially in the US. Marty Schafer and Jan Sacks had been growing it for over 25 years. They kindly donated 2 plants to the MUN Botanical Garden, thus returning ‘Murrayana’ to its roots. Lost and found.

Although Fernald accepted the specimen as a form of *I. versicolor* (and some authorities even list the name as a synonym) the chromosome count has now cast doubt on this. *I. versicolor* has the highest chromosome count of any iris – $2n=108$ – and is an ancient natural cross between *I. virginica* and *I. setosa*, inheriting a full set of chromosomes from each parent. ‘Murrayana’ is $2n=80$ (Tony Huber). When comparing it with other selections of *I. versicolor*, ‘Murrayana’ shows distinct differences. In particular the falls are much narrower, and the flower stems shorter compared to the leaves. Moreover, Todd Boland found that crossing ‘Murrayana’ with native Newfoundland *versicolors*, and also named selections, produced mostly sterile offspring, again indicating that it is not a form of the species. A note on the AIS Iris Encyclopaedia webpage suggests that ‘Murrayana’ is a natural hybrid, probably involving *I. virginica*, while Boland notes that it has been said to be a form of *I. virginica* var. *shrevei*. Neither of these is native to Newfoundland; indeed, Boland states that the nearest that *shrevei* occurs is over a thousand miles away! So, the aetiology of *I. versicolor* ‘Murrayana’



Iris versicolor 'Murrayana' ©Jan Sacks

Editor's notes.

Intrigued with the story I decided to check out what Jan knew about the history of 'Murrayana' and above is their clump, which looks full of cool serenity on a hot day and very pretty with the flowers just below the top of the stems. It would not pass the judges critique today and Jan hasn't used it for any of her modern hybrids. 'Murrayana' has a pinky yellow rhizome whereas the rest of the versicolors have white rhizomes. It looks as if it has extended bloom.

Iris versicolor is a very useful plant for any area prone to be wet or damp, but could also fit in any border just as easily. In very dry weather it may need to have a layer of mulch to keep in moisture and stop it drying out. Jan's photo above shows it growing in open ground and has been there for a long time. What a beautiful large clump it makes. It can also be used to fit in with lots of border plants. *Iris versicolor* 'Versicle' is a hybrid bred by of Marty and Jan. 'Mint Fresh' is a lovely hybrid from 1983 introduced by Bee Warburton from mixed SIGNA seed.



Iris versicolor 'Versicle' (1998) ('Party Line' X 'Little Rhyme') hybrid by Jan Sacks ©Jan Sacks



Iris versicolor 'Mint Fresh' (1983) Bee Warburton second generation from mixed *I. versicolor* seed (SIGNA). ©Jan Sacks

***Iris* from Curtis's Botanical Magazine Part 4** **Brian Mathew**

A more detailed introduction to this series of articles, giving historical details of the *Botanical Magazine*, appeared in the 2018 *Year Book*.

William Curtis's famous journal made its debut on the 1st of February 1787 and has continued in an unbroken series ever since. It is probably the oldest botanical periodical still being published and is thought to be the world's longest surviving magazine in colour. *Iris* has been a popular subject with the *Bot. Mag.* over the years with about 150 species featured to date. It would be impossible to cover these in one article for the *Year Book* so they have been divided into their subgenera and series and they will be reviewed here in these taxonomic groupings. The first three articles looked at the *Bot. Mag.* illustrations of *Iris* species of subgenus *Hermodactyloides* (the Reticulatas) [Part 1], those of the series *Sibiricae* and *Spuriae* [Part 2] and those of Section *Iris* (the 'Pogons') [Part 3]. The articles provide extracts from the original texts combined with comments based on more recent knowledge. In Part 4 we explore the *Bot. Mag.* coverage of the species of section *Lophiris* (the 'Evansias'). Grateful thanks go to Tim Loe who has sourced good copies of many of these illustrations for reproduction here.

Part 2. *Iris* from Curtis's Botanical Magazine: section *Lophiris*

Chronological order of publication:

1. *I. japonica* [publ. as *I. chinensis*] Plate 373 (1797) by Sydenham Edwards
2. *I. cristata* Plate 412 (1798) by Sydenham Edwards
3. *I. tectorum* Plate 6118 (1874) by Walter Hood Fitch
4. *I. milesii* Plate 6889 (1886) by Matilda Smith
5. *I. gracilipes* Plate 7926 (1903) by Matilda Smith
6. *I. wattii* Plate 9590 (1939) by Stella Ross-Craig

1. *Iris japonica* Thunb., Trans. Linn. Soc. London 2: 327 (1794).
Bot. Mag. plate 373 (1797) [as *I. chinensis*]. Artist: Sydenham Edwards.
Engraver: Sydenham Edwards or Francis Sansom. Text: William Curtis.

This, the most well-known of the Asiatic species of *Lophiris*, was described as a new species, *I. chinensis*, by Curtis in 1797 as seen here in Plate 373, so this illustration is in effect a representation of the type specimen. However, unknown to or overlooked by Curtis, Thunberg had three years earlier named it *I. japonica* so that name takes priority. These two geographical epithets raise the obvious question: is it Chinese or Japanese? The revised edition of Jisaburo Ohwi's *Flora of Japan* (1953) states: 'Wooded hills; Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu; common. China.' This gives no hint as to whether it was an introduction from China into Japan, whereas the next species included in the *Flora*, *I. tectorum*, is noted as being a 'Chinese plant but long-cultivated in Japan'. *Iris japonica* is certainly native in China and widespread according to

the English edition of *Flora of China* Vol. 24 (2000), occurring in at least 18 of the provinces. As all those gardeners who have cultivated the species will know it is very vigorous in its rate of vegetative increase and is thus very easy to propagate and pass on from one person to another; it quite possibly reached Japan in early times along with other ornamental plants from China and well ahead of Carl Peter Thunberg who collected specimens there during his stay of 1775-6.

The material used for the *Bot. Mag.* illustration was apparently derived from a collection made in China. Curtis noted that “The public are indebted to Mr. Evans of the India-House for the introduction of this plant from China, where it is a native.” This was Thomas Evans (1751-1814), an employee of the East India Company, who had a keen interest in gardening and used his contacts to acquire exotic plants which he cultivated in Stepney, London; some of his contacts were in Guangzhou (Canton), China. Curtis further noted that “It flowered last year [1796], at different periods, for the first time, in many collections near London...Mr Thomson, Nurseryman of Mile-End, at the close of the year, had it growing very luxuriantly in the open ground; but the severe winter of 1796-1797, in which the thermometer at Brompton [i.e. where Curtis had his Botanic Garden] was three degrees below 0 [i.e. minus 19.4C], destroyed it”. For 1796 weather records show that in London -21C was recorded on Christmas Eve and the River Thames was frozen. The plant used for this plate may well have been grown at the Brompton Garden although it is said to have been in cultivation several years earlier; the 2nd Edition of Aiton’s *Hortus Kewensis* (1814) records its ‘first trace in the English gardens’ as 1792.

Evans introduced several well-known plants and he is remembered in the names of some of them including *Begonia evansiana*; the British botanist Richard Anthony Salisbury described a genus for him in 1812, renaming Curtis’s *Iris chinensis* as *Evansia chinensis*. This was subsequently used as the name for a subgenus or subsection of *Iris* and they are still popularly known as ‘the Evansias’.

The illustration by Sydenham Edwards captures all the distinctive features of



I. japonica including the stoloniferous method of spreading. As Curtis says: “it differs from all other known Iris’s, in having a root perfectly of the creeping kind... by which it is rendered very easy of propagation”.

2. *Iris cristata* Aiton, Hort. Kew. 1: 70 (1789). Bot. Mag. Plate 412 (1797). Artist: Sydenham Edwards. Engraver: Sydenham Edwards or Francis Sansom. Text: William Curtis.

The beautiful dwarf North American *Iris cristata* had been in cultivation for over 30 years when featured in the *Bot. Mag.* It was described in detail by William Aiton in 1789 in the catalogue of plants cultivated at Kew, the *Index Kewensis*, and reported to have been introduced in 1756 by Peter Collinson (1694-1768). Collinson was a wool merchant with a love of gardening whose London-based firm traded with North America and this enabled him to acquire plants and seeds through his business associates. The family garden at Peckham and later his own at Mill



Hill (now part of Mill Hill School) were noted for their rich collections and it was said that there was no garden in the whole of Europe that could match his collection of rare plants from around the world. He was friendly with a wide range of botanists and other scientists including John Bartram who started the first botanical garden in North America, in Philadelphia. He collected many plants for Collinson who in turn was generous in distributing them to others in Britain. Bartram was also highly regarded as a botanist by Linnaeus, another of Collinson’s botanical contacts, who named the genus *Collinsonia* (Lamiaceae or Labiatae) in his honour.

The painting by Sydenham Edwards captures the plant’s characteristics perfectly and shows a feature that Curtis stresses, that ‘it appears to increase much in the same way as most others of the genus with this difference, that when it grows luxuriantly it throws out longer shoots’. On the matter of cultivation Curtis notes that *I. cristata* would not succeed at all in a dry soil and needed a moist situation with the protection of a glass cover in severe weather. It does appear that winter wet can be one of the main problems (and molluscs!) with cultivation in the UK but given well-drained soil and light shade it is a delightful species in all its various colour forms, including white.

3. *Iris tectorum* Maxim., Bull. Acad. Imp. Sci. Saint-Pétersbourg xv: 380 (1871). Bot. Mag. Plate 6118 (1874). Artist and Engraver: Walter Hood Fitch. Text: Joseph Dalton Hooker.

As with *I. japonica* it is questionable whether *I. tectorum* is a native Chinese or Japanese plant. It is very widely cultivated in both countries, however J. Ohwi's *Flora of Japan* (1953 ed.) states that it is a 'Chinese plant long cultivated in Japan, frequently grown on the roof of straw-thatched houses'.

It is worth quoting Hooker's account of the material used by Fitch for this plate: 'Although the plant here figured came from Whampoa [probably a district of Shanghai] in China, where it was cultivated by Dr. Hance, Her Britannic Majesty's Vice-Consul at that port, there can be no question but that it is the Japanese *Iris tectorum* of Maximovicz, which grows in fields about Yokohama in Japan, and is likewise cultivated by the Japanese'. Henry Fletcher Hance (1827-1886) was a British diplomat whose interest was the study of Chinese plants; he served in Hong Kong, Canton and Xiamen as Consul over many years so would have had plenty of opportunity for his explorations. Although professionally a diplomat Hance was also a knowledgeable and respected botanist who named and described many new species including *I. speculatrix*, published by him in the *Journal of Botany* in 1875. Interestingly he thought that some of the examples of *I. tectorum* were distinct enough to be named as a separate species which he called *I. tomiolopha*, an unfamiliar epithet meaning *cut* (i.e. *dissected*) *crest*. Hooker, however, comments on the variability of the species so this name is reduced to synonymy. As a mark of respect for his work the genus *Hancea* (Euphorbiaceae) was named in his honour in 1875 by Seeman.



The plant from which Fitch prepared the painting was attributed to a Mr. Bull [probably William Bull, a botanist/nurseryman in King's Road, Chelsea] "which was raised from seeds sent by Dr. Hance from his garden in Whampoa, and which flowered in April, 1874". Unusually for *Bot. Mag.* nothing is said about its cultivation but it is not a difficult plant in the open border and is very frost-hardy. On a personal note, I (BM) can vouch for this. In Beijing *I. tectorum* is often to be seen planted in parks and in roadside beds. In winter the ground is frozen to a considerable depth and as hard as iron so I was surprised to see the rhizomes apparently unharmed by this; but they were totally dry as there is almost no rainfall in Beijing at this time of year and a relative humidity of around 40% (London 70-90%). Any lack of success in the UK could well be due to winter wet.

4. *I. milesii* Baker ex Foster in Gard. Chron. n.s. 20: 231 (1883). Bot. Mag. Plate 6889 (1886). Artist: Matilda Smith. Engraver: J.N. Fitch. Text: J.G. Baker.

The specimen from which Plate 6889 was prepared was sent in May 1886 by Mr Richard Irwin Lynch who was the Curator at Cambridge Botanic Garden. Lynch had been a student at RBG Kew, where he had excelled, then became Foreman of two separate departments before being recommended by Sir Joseph Hooker for the post at Cambridge. In *Iris* circles he is known for his work *The Book of the Iris* (1904) which is both botanically valuable and full of horticultural information for the gardener. He sent a considerable number of plants to Hooker for inclusion in *Bot. Mag.* and Vol. 143 (1917) was dedicated to him. The RHS recognised his talent by bestowing on him the Veitch Memorial Medal and their highest award, the Victoria Medal of Honour. The Kew Guild elected him as their President.



As to the subject of the illustration, this was named for George Frederick Miles (known as Frank) who was an artist and gardener, although his paintings did not involve plants but portraits of stylish females of the late 19th century. The quality of these paintings earned him the Turner Prize in 1880. It was Sir Michael Foster who first named and described it as *I. milesii* in the *Gardener's Chronicle* of 1883. Foster was a botanist and keen gardener and communicated with many of the influential horticulturists, nurserymen and botanists of the day. He specialised in *Iris* and often commemorated his acquaintances when naming new species and so we have, for example, *Iris willmottiana* (after the famous gardener Ellen Willmott) and *I. warleyensis* (after her garden, Warley, in Essex); *I. bakeriana* (J.G. Baker, botanist of Kew Gardens); *I. tubergeniana* (C.G. van Tubergen, nurseryman); and *I. ewbankiana* (after Rev. Henry Ewbank, enthusiastic gardener and botanist on the Isle of Wight).

The first collection of *I. milesii* was made in the Himachal Pradesh in 1876 by Sir Dietrich Brandis, a German-British botanist of great renown specialising in the forestry of India. In his text Baker states that 'This interesting new *Iris* was received in seed by Mr Frank Miles from the Kulu and Parbutta valleys of the North-Western Himalaya, and first flowered in this country in the summer of 1883'.

Iris milesii is a successful garden plant requiring a position that will not dry out excessively in summer. Its main drawback is the fleeting nature of the flowers although the inflorescence is branched and several flowers are produced in succession over a period of weeks from each set of bracts. The Plate does give a good indication of the habit and of the dull lilac/pinkish shade of the flowers; it is not a showy species!

5. *I. gracilipes* A. Gray, Mem. Amer. Acad. Arts ser. 2, 6(2): 412 (1858). Bot. Mag. Plate 7926 (1903). Artist: Matilda Smith. Engraver: J.N. Fitch. Text: W.B. Hemsley.

In the text accompanying the illustration of *I. gracilipes* W.B. Hemsley draws attention to the “distinct crest on the lower part of the blade and claw of the outer segments” although unfortunately this is not apparent in the painting.

However there is no doubt that this is the species under review here as there is no other quite like it and its describer Hemsley was an experienced botanist. William Botting Hemsley (1843-1924) started working at RBG Kew as an improver and worked in various roles until becoming Keeper of the Herbarium and Library. He described and named many new species and was awarded a VMH by the RHS.



The epithet *gracilipes* means ‘slender foot’ – in this case the peduncles or flower stalks but really the whole plant has a slender appearance with narrow leaves and small delicate flowers.

The plant depicted here was cultivated at Kew, having been “procured from Mr. Max Leichtlin in September, 1902, and it flowered in pots in a cold frame, and also in an open bed during last spring. Mr. R. I. Lynch (referred to under *I. milesii*, see above) sent flowering specimens from Cambridge in April”.

Iris gracilipes is not a difficult species to cultivate, given a slightly shaded position in leafmould-rich soil and not allowed to dry out excessively in summer. It also makes a good subject for the alpine house.

6. *I. watti* Baker ex Hook. f., Fl. Brit. India 6: 273 (1892). Bot. Mag. Plate 9590 (1939). Artist: Stella Ross-Craig. Engraver: Lilian Snelling. Text: J.R. Sealy.

It was Kew botanist John Gilbert Baker who first suggested the name *I. wattii* based on a specimen collected by George Watt in the Indian state of Manipur; the name was subsequently validly published by Joseph Dalton Hooker in the multi-volume *Flora of British India*, hence the citation Baker ex Hooker. The text for this illustration was provided by Kew botanist Joseph Robert Sealy who was married to the artist Stella Ross-Craig whose botanical illustration appears here; they were both great supporters of *Curtis's Bot. Mag.* and this was recognised in Volume 182 which was dedicated to them.

Sealy writes that “This beautiful and remarkable iris was introduced into cultivation by Major Lawrence Johnston as a result of his journey to China with the late George Forrest in 1931. Major Johnston found plants growing near an irrigation channel on the way to the sulphur springs in the neighbourhood of Tengyueh [now Tengchong* in Yunnan], and dug up rhizomes which he subsequently planted in his garden near Mentone, France...From Mentone the species has been sent to gardens in this country, and it is to Lord Aberconway of Bodnant, Tal-y-Cafn, N. Wales, that we are indebted for the material figured here”. He further comments that at Bodnant the plant reaches six feet in height. This is due to the stout aerial leafless stems produced by this species, looking more like bamboo stems, crowned by a fan of leaves and the inflorescence. The *Bot. Mag.* illustration here by Stella Ross-Craig shows off the habit perfectly. As Sealy says, the stemmed habit distinguishes this *Iris* from all others except *I. confusa*, a related species described by him in the *Gardeners Chronicle* in 1937. The latter is however altogether less stout with narrower leaves and much smaller paler flowers but it can still reach four feet when growing well. Both are tender over most of the UK but do well in the milder areas of the West and South-West. A humus-rich soil in semi shade seems to offer the best method of cultivation, or a slightly heated glasshouse or conservatory.

George Watt (1851-1930) was a Scottish physician-botanist who specialised in studies of the economic botany of India;



the results were published in his multi-volume *Dictionary of Economic Products of India* (1893), perhaps the most significant work to have been compiled about natural commercial products. He was also employed in 1881 as Medical Officer to the Burma-Manipur Boundary Commission during which he had the brief to collect botanical specimens, presumably including the future *I. wattii*. Various plants were named for him including *Primula wattii*, *Aster wattii*, *Oreosolen wattii*, *Begonia wattii* and many others.

*The climate in Tengchong is described as being mild, dry and sunny while summers are warm, rainy and usually overcast. This may assist would-be cultivators to assess their chances.

Two Iris of Series *Chinenses* Brian Mathew

In recent years there have been introductions into the UK of living material of an *Iris* under the name *I. henryi*, offered by a Chinese ‘nursery’ and of unstated wild source. Although still rather uncommon in cultivation these have settled in and are around in some specialist collections. At the same time there has been considerable interest in these small irises of the *Chinenses* Series irises in the U.S. with several wild collections introduced legitimately by Darrell Probst. These have stimulated taxonomic research into the group and a study of Darrell’s plants has led to a recent paper by Carol A. Wilson, published in the journal *Phytokeys* 161: 41-60 (2020) where two new species related to but distinct from *I. henryi* are described. From this it is clear that one of the plants referred to above that is being cultivated in Britain as *I. henryi* should now take the name *I. dabashanensis* C.A.Wilson, one of the newly described species. This dwarf iris has proved to be an excellent plant in our Surrey garden, soon forming dense clumps and flowering freely. The other new one has been named *I. probstii* C.A. Wilson after its collector who has done much work to propagate and distribute them and other members of the *Chinenses*. Darrell is a prominent specialist horticulturist, nurseryman and plant hunter notable for breeding and development work in other plant groups particularly *Epimedium* and *Coreopsis* as well as *Iris*. *Iris dabashanensis* is named after the Daba Mountains in the Chinese provinces of Sichuan and Hubei where it inhabits rocky slopes on calcareous soils. *Iris probstii* occurs in Guizhou Province at about 800-1000m on ‘open slopes along edges of rice paddies or under low pine woods in grassy sites associated with rocky, karst soils’.

In addition to describing the two new species the study looked more widely at the *Chinenses* and there is a useful key to the species that are considered to constitute this section, namely *I. koreana*, *I. odaesanensis*, *I. rossii*, *I. proantha*, *I. minutoaurea*, *I. henryi*, *I. probstii* and *I. dabashanensis*. The

morphological characters used to distinguish them include flower colour, leaf width, length of perianth tube and details of the crests on the falls.

Phylogenetic (molecular) studies confirmed the relationship between the two new species and the Korean *I. odaesanensis*, and showed strong support for this group of small Asiatic irises to be recognised as a distinct unit within *Iris*. *Iris speculatrix* and two others which may be distinct from it, *I. grijsii* and *I. cavaleri*, are excluded as they are considered not to be part of section *Chinenses*; the latter two may be variants of *I. speculatrix* and require further study. The paper includes very good photographs and drawings of the newly described species.

The author acknowledges the assistance of Jan Sacks and Marty Schafer who provided additional information.



I. dabashanensis, growing outside in Surrey, April 20 2021
Photo ©Brian Mathew

As mentioned above I am growing *I. dabashanensis* both in pots under glass and planted out in the garden. Our clay soil needs improvement by the addition of organic matter or it becomes waterlogged in winter and baked hard in summer; the pH is just on the acid side of neutral but although in the wild it is reported as occurring on calcareous soils the conditions here seem to be tolerable. Two clumps of this iris are in a slightly raised bed, only c. 4-6 inches above the surroundings in a partially shaded situation. Due to the

north-facing aspect and clay soil the garden does not warm quickly in spring; the lowest temperature I have experienced in recent years is -10°C but the evergreen leaves of this species remain undamaged.

Thanks to Darrell Probst I also have *I. probstii* but to date this has only been tried in a sandy/gritty potting medium, planted into a semi-shaded cold frame along with various other collections of his *Chinenses* irises and others from Jan Sacks and Marty Schafer. Both of these new species flowered in 2021 and photos are included here. Although diminutive they are delightful additions to the collection and deserve to be more widely known among Iris species enthusiasts and alpine gardeners.



I. probstii growing in a cold frame in Surrey
May 29 2021
Photo ©Brian Mathew

A Visit to America

Brita Carson

Two years ago, before Covid, we had a sunshine holiday in America, trying to fit in as many and varied visits as possible but for me the highlights of our trip were the two visits to two iris gardens.

The first one was to Terry and Barbara Aitken's garden in Vancouver, Washington, not Vancouver, Canada. We stayed with Terry and Barbara and after the long flight from Scotland it was the most relaxing place to be to get our breath back. The tranquil beauty of the garden and nursery flowing with



plants, shrubs and trees as well as fields of irises. It is the kind of garden you could wander round at any time of day for as long as you could keep walking, and particularly lovely as the shadows lengthen to welcome the evening after a hot day. Or you could take off quietly in the early morning and look for the waking wildlife while you see what has just opened for the first time in the iris fields. Look at the muntjac deer sitting under the tree in the left-hand photo. She has spotted us but isn't sure if she has to run or can stay where she is. Terry and Barbara obviously don't move them having a real soft spot for wildlife. When we weren't there they are probably fed by hand.

This was July and all of Terry's bearded irises had finished flowering with signs of fattening seed pods appearing. Most of the Siberians were almost over and others had started to produce seed heads but that was not what I was hoping to see. I wanted to be awestruck and pour out admiration for his

extended flowering Siberians which is one of Terry's ambitions. He has been hybridising longer flowering or extending flowering Siberians for many years now. I have the passion for these too but he has the success which is eluding me. Terry reckons the Scottish conditions should be ideal and he feels it is important for the soil temperature not to be too hot. That isn't a problem for me, more likely we suffer from cooling down too quickly - too cold for any further growth or flowering until the following year.

Not content with a passion for irises, Barbara knows that each autumn holiday means looking at all the orchids on Hawaii, returning home with hundreds of tiny flasks of them. The homework they take with them - is making up names for his new exciting hybrids selected from the many rows of seedlings. Barbara doesn't complain and I hope Terry takes her out for lots of meals while they are there to save her cooking!

Terry has constructed a large polytunnel to house his ever-expanding collection of orchids which isn't allowed to bake in strong, hot sun but is confined to shade at all times and is a pleasant place to cool down. Inside the house everywhere are lots of pots of flowering orchids which Barbara can have changed whenever she wants. What an extravagant indulgence.



A hybridiser for umpteen years Terry has produced new irises including TBs, BBs, Siberians, spurias, Japanese and also pseudatas. He is supposed to be taking things easy now, Barbara told us, although used to hard work all his life I doubt he ever will. He lets Barbara take over the computing work now and enjoys working outside with his plants. Before retirement Terry was an architect, so he naturally designed and built his own house or I expect Barbara made a lot of the decisions but did he purposely build a decking extension out from the kitchen for feeding the birds where you can eat

breakfast in the sunshine, with the birds and squirrels for company. And did Terry know that the decking was sufficiently high up for a couple of muntjac deer to live underneath. There aren't many who are happy to have the deer living so close to them but nothing seemed more natural. They do eat a lot but the garden can cope and it probably saves a bit of annual cutting back.

I couldn't believe how many Siberian irises were still in flower and full flower not half hearted. I brought back envelopes of fresh pollen but sadly had no Siberians still in flower to use them on. Terry had a lovely selection of Japanese irises too but I was looking forward to seeing Chads so I wallowed in flowering Siberians in July. Terry must have another secret which he doesn't realise he has or he would have shared with me.



One of many fields of irises in different stages from preparation to flowering in all their glory.

It was an enchanting couple of days, some would have wanted to go when the Beardeds were in flower and others would have preferred the Siberians and PCIs but for me the extended flowerers and orchids fitted perfectly with our trip along with the gentle kindness and lovely hospitality of Terry and Barbara. It was very special.

'See Ya Later'
Bob Hollingworth's
This is a rebloomer.



'Moonstone Marvel'
This is an extended
bloomer and one of
Terry's.

'Burgundy Fireworks' just about to open and a favourite of mine. It is a rebloomer but not with me yet and had finished flowering by July. One of Terry's own hybrids. ('Reddy or Not' X 'Hello Yellow', 2013)



Constant watering is always needed
in dry spells.

Look how high the deer can reach by
standing on their back legs, to eat up
to the line in the conifers.

Photos in this article ©Julia Carson

Washougal, the second Highlight

Our trip to Chad Harris and his partner, Dale Grams, was on an extremely hot day enough to melt me but the rows of ensatas were in full flower and they basked in the sun and heat. Mount Pleasant Iris Farm, Washougal, WA. Washougal what a tantalising name to swirl round your tongue but there it stops. This is a garden of no nonsense with its sharp lines and all the grass standing upright in military fashion. When we arrived our first sight was the natural looking bushes laden with ripe soft fruit and carefully supported. Weeds don't feature in this garden especially when, in the summertime, Chad gets up in the coolness of dawn to do jobs like weeding.



The photos on the right show the extent of Chad's vast estate with the neatest rows of irises you will ever see.

Although the site slopes down to a fast, busy road at the front, at the back, above and behind the house, it is cooled by tall, mature trees of woodland, hiding where the ice cold water flows down through a waterfall to a pond that Chad and Dale have made. Whether he made it for his visiting wildlife or they could just smell the cool mountain water and came in search of it, I don't know. Can you believe they have visiting bears, coyotes, deer, elk, bobcats, and cougars, not to mention all the vermin that satisfies the upper food chain. Many birds also visit the pond and stream which flows down from the Columbia River Gorge. The pond, waterfall and stream are well hidden by the trees surrounding them giving the wildlife plenty of cover. No matter how much Chad says the wildlife are more scared of me I would take a lot of convincing to venture out after dark behind the house and newly converted barn. Julia doesn't usually baulk at walking in darkness but those animals made her think twice. A converted barn doesn't do it justice. It is a majestic building for holding all the various pieces of equipment for the farm.



Aerial View of the house, converted barn and grounds which is Mount Pleasant Iris Farm.

The rows of plants grow happily on the south facing garden. A lovely idea was an open invitation to any visitors who wanted to come and see the gardens which both Chad and Terry have displayed at the roadside in front of their houses. Chad had a family visit him when we were there and he patiently spoke to them all. I doubt they were iris growers but possibly one day.





What a breath-taking sight and nary a weed. Husband, Tom, with Terry in the background and Barbara and the Japanese irises. Terry and Barbara kindly took us to visit Chad's garden. Tom was so impressed with Chad's dedication to everything he was doing.

If purple is your colour, ensatas are for you.
 Information from the *Review of the Society for Japanese Irises*.
 Volume 58, No 2 Fall 2021



'Night Angel' (Aitken)1996



'Frosted Intrigue' (Bauer/Coble)1997

2021 Payne Medal Winners



'Columbia Deep Water' (Chad Harris)



'Dalle Whitewater' (Chad Harris)

Chad won both Payne Medals and he also won two Awards of Merit with 'Columbia Crest', and 'Koto Harp Strings'. These four are all siblings from 'Night Angel' (Terry Aitken) X 'Frosted Intrigue' (Bauer/Coble).

The Payne Medal is the highest medal that can be awarded to a Japanese iris and is necessary before the iris can go forward for the American Dykes Medal. All four are siblings and it would be so exciting if one of Chads irises could be in the running as Sib. 'Swans in Flight' was and won the American Dykes Medal in 2016.



Columbia Crest'



'Koto Harp Strings

All photographs taken and kindly sent by email from ©Chad Harris. We wish you well for future medals.

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My sincere thanks to all the contributors of articles and photographs for this edition of the *Review*. Please do get in touch if you have something to say and would like to write for the next edition.

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Proof Readers: Julia Carson, Marina Jackson, Alun and Jill Whitehead.

Photographers: The photographs have their owners written below. If it is without a name it means the photograph was taken by the author of the article.



©Bauer/Coble

'Cascade Crest', (Terry Aitken, R. 1988), ('Knight In Armor' X 'Reign Of Glory')
Winner of the Payne Medal 1995



©Chad Harris

'Cascade Rain', (Chad Harris, R. 2007) ('Hekiun' X 'Peacock Strut')
Winner of the Payne Medal 2019

