

## **BEARDLESS IRIS**

**Vaughn Sayles**

A large number of us grow beardless iris for various reasons. In addition to their grace and beauty, many will survive and actually thrive in conditions where bearded iris are not successful. There are iris in this group which grow well in shade and many which do well in wet soil. One of the biggest incentives for growing them is that they extend the iris bloom season, and most have foliage which is pleasing in the landscape when the iris are not in bloom. With the right selection of beardless iris, you can have bloom from April through early August. Their grass-like foliage remains presentable all season.

There are five groups of beardless iris which have undergone extensive hybridization and have American Iris Society Sections devoted to them: Siberian, Spuria, Japanese, Pacific Coast Native, and Louisiana Iris. SIGNA, Species Iris Group of North America, is the advocate for species and species crosses, most of which are beardless. In spite of the efforts of these groups to promote beardless iris, the American Iris Society has not yet awarded the Dykes Medal to a beardless iris although other iris societies have. A Siberian iris which I feel has a chance for this award is 'Ginger Twist' (Schafer/Sacks, 2009), which has an abundance of distinctive blooms and has done well in my garden and in a number of gardens that I've visited. Marty and Jan were awarded the Walther Cup in 2012 for 'Ginger Twist' since it received the greatest number of votes in the HM Award balloting.

In Region 2, two judges training sessions on beardless iris were conducted this year. In-garden training was conducted in Ithaca and East Aurora, New York. In both gardens, attendees were encouraged to bring boots and umbrellas in case of inclement weather which we had an abundance of in June 2014. The training in Ithaca on June 12 at the gardens of Vaughn

Sayles and E.J. Mattson was mainly on species and species cross iris although there were a number of Siberians and a Japanese seedling in bloom.



Nice boots! (photo by E. J. Mattson)

The boots and umbrellas were utilized at the judges training in Ithaca. We experienced wind and rain, and the participants had to walk through areas of the lawn that had standing water. Iris judges are certainly not going to let the weather stop them from receiving in-garden training or seeing uncommon iris in bloom.



There really are iris around the lily pond. (photo by E. J. Mattson)

*The AIS Handbook for Judges and Show Officials* encourages all AIS Judges to grow

the species iris most commonly grown in their area. *Iris versicolor* is native to Region 2, and several cultivars were in bloom at the time of the garden training in Ithaca. Some were in gardens and some were naturalized at the edge of a small pond with water lilies. 'Cascade Mist' (Dana Borglum, 1999) was putting on a nice display, but the irises that generated the most interest were the species crosses which Vaughn has collected over the years.

Joanne Bassett's judges training in East Aurora focused on Louisiana and Japanese iris. One impressive iris was the species cross 'Enfant Prodigé' (Tony Huber, 1993). This iris is from a cross of 'Oriental Touch' (Huber, 1993, *Iris versicolor* x *Iris ensata*) with an *Iris ensata*. There were several clumps of this enchanting iris in Joanne Bassett's gardens.



'Enfant Prodigé'

Joanne is converting a naturally wet area to a garden featuring Japanese and Louisiana iris. Many of the iris were in bud and we hope to see this area next year

when they are in bloom. It should be a colorful and interesting assemblage.



Joanne watching the class regroup.

Joanne had Louisiana iris and Japanese iris coming into bloom in several gardens. It was interesting to see the different forms and color combinations exhibited by the flowers in bloom. As we walked from garden to garden, Joanne shared her knowledge on what judges needed to look for with these iris and how to grow them.

We were fortunate that Joe Musacchia from Louisiana and M. J. Urist joined us for the training session in East Aurora. M. J. is responsible for Louisiana Iris Gardens near Tully, NY. Her gardens have been visited by many of the judges in Region 2 where Joe has offered judges trainings on Louisiana iris in the past. Joe and M. J. shared additional information on Louisiana iris.

Both judges trainings provided the attendees with a chance to see many types of beardless iris growing and blooming under a variety of conditions. Since the beardless iris are not bothered by leaf spot and their foliage is often attractive even when they are not in bloom, these iris may be what you are looking for to add to your collections and landscape. Most are graceful and greatly extend the season of iris bloom and locations where you may grow iris. As more club members add them to their gardens we should see more of them at the club shows and sales.