

The Iris Standard

Newsletter of the
Ontario Iris Society

An affiliate of the
American Iris Society

Volume 20 Issue 1 - Winter 2025

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1-year single: \$10 1-year family: \$15
3-year single: \$25 3-year family: \$40

Check the ONIS website for details,
[Ontario Iris Society \(google.com\)](#)

Visit the AIS WIKI

Use this link to access the American Iris
Society's Iris Encyclopedia,
[WebHome < Main < Iris Wiki \(irises.org\)](#).

Find information about irises,
hybridizers, iris societies and more.

Editor's Message

Happy New Year! Hope you had a happy holiday season!

We're starting the new year with an edition dedicated to reblooming irises. Let me explain why...

While attending a flower show last September, I overheard a conversation between two men checking the entries into the category for "Any bulb, corm, tuber, rhizome, 1 stem". Someone had entered a beautiful stem of 'Immortality', and the two men were looking at it in disbelief. "How can that be?" said one man. The second man's response was, "They must have a greenhouse". They continued to inspect the entry from all angles as if looking for evidence it had not been grown outdoors.

Of course I had to step-in, explaining the iris was a reblooming iris named 'Immortality' and that it had been hybridized by Canadian hybridizer, Lloyd Zurbrigg. The two men stared at me blankly and said nothing. As they walked away one of them shouted back, "I was always told reblooming irises were a myth!". I wondered how many other people had this same misconception!



We'll also be looking at Canadian hybridizer, Isabella Preston. A fellow iris lover is looking for Miss Preston's iris registrations with the goal of preserving them for future generations. Hopefully we can help. 'Gatineau' (Preston, 1932).

Finally, our upcoming events are listed in the ONIS Matters section on the last page. Kate

President's Pointers

ONIS has been planning events for the upcoming year. In addition to 'Get the Jump on Spring' in February, we will be returning to Evergreen Brick Works for their two-day Seedy Saturday on March 8 and 9. Our flower show will be on May 25 to take advantage of the median iris cultivars that bloom at this time. Our August Auction and Sale will be August 10. Mark your calendars now and join us!

Report from the 2024 AIS Region 2 Annual General Meeting

The 2024 AIS Region 2 annual meeting was held via zoom on October 26. Cara Hutchings, from the Greater Rochester Iris Society (GRIS), agreed to return for another year as Regional Vice President (RVP). This will be her final year as RVPs are allowed only three one-year terms. Debi Chowdhury, from the Capital-Hudson Iris Society (CHIS), will join Region 2 as Assistant RVP while Annette Kuhn, from the Western New York Iris Society (WNYIS), will continue as Treasurer. Kate Brewitt, from the Ontario Iris Society (ONIS), will return as Secretary.

After the meeting Chuck Chapman, iris hybridizer, gave a presentation entitled "Broken Colour And Variations". It was an in-depth look into the different types of broken colour found in irises and the science behind them.

Upcoming Conventions



**'Aim for Ames for
Irises'
2025 Siberian and
Species Iris
Convention.
Ames, Iowa
May 23 – 24, 2025**

Hosted by the Lincoln Iris Society in conjunction with the spring meeting for AIS Region 21, this two-day convention includes tours of three

gardens, two with guest Siberian and species irises, in-garden judges' training, and silent and live auctions. The host hotel is the Gateway Hotel & Conference Center in Ames, Iowa.

For details on activities, registration, and hotel reservations, click here, [convention2025.pdf](#)

'Iris Under the Big Sky' 2025 AIS National Convention Billings, Montana June 2 to 7, 2025



This convention will be hosted by the Big Sky Iris Club. On the convention website you will find a list of the week's activities plus optional tours available. You can also register and find

a link to book your hotel room: [2025 AIS Convention – Big Sky Iris Club](#). The convention hotel is the Billings Hotel and Convention Center in Billings, Montana. Register by April 1, 2025 before registration rates increase.

Experience the Host Gardens in Advance

[The Gardens at Zoo Montana](#) - website

[Eagle Ridge Iris Gardens](#) - website

[Muriel's Iris Garden](#) – Facebook page

[Danwalt Gardens](#) – website

[Tina and Daughters Iris Garden](#) – website

Cynthia St. Charles Garden

As always, feel free to email me with questions about your irises, tlaurin@rogers.com.



Rebloomers: The Possibilities and the Pitfalls

Taken from an article by Ann Head which appeared in the 2024 Fall Edition of The Reblooming Iris Recorder – Journal of the Reblooming Iris Society.

The capacity for irises to rebloom first piqued my interest some 25 years ago and has remained a source of fascination ever since. Rebloom can be defined as bloom which occurs outside of the variety's normal spring season. This out-of-season bloom can occur at any time of year, from immediately following the spring bloom (these are classed as "repeat" bloomers), to summer, autumn and even winter in mild climates. However, autumn is generally the peak time for rebloom.



'Precious Little Pink' reblooming October 22, 2022, in Canadian hardiness zone 5b © K. Brewitt

When irises which bloomed out-of-season first began to appear in hybridizers' seedling patches, most hybridizers did not welcome them. There was, and in many cases still is, a feeling that rebloomers cause problems for nursery owners, by producing bloom stalks just when orders need to be dug. Thus some iris hybridizers have had a long-term policy of discarding seedlings which rebloomed. This has

undoubtedly contributed to the slow progress in expanding both the colour range and flower form of reblooming irises. Studying the history of rose breeding provides a striking contrast, as traditionally, roses bloomed only in spring. Once breeders saw an emerging potential for roses to bloom more than once a year, this was widely pursued as a hybridizing goal, until reblooming roses became the accepted norm. While reblooming irises have gradually gained some appreciation in the iris world, I feel they remain under-recognised and thus under-utilised by many home gardeners.

One challenge for both the marketing and the purchasing of reblooming iris varieties is that just because an iris can rebloom doesn't mean it will. Many irises carry a genetic predisposition to rebloom; however this will usually only manifest itself when the conditions are exactly right for that cultivar. Varieties which rebloom happily in one location may not rebloom in another. Even when climate and cultural conditions are conducive to rebloom, additional factors such as rhizome maturity are likely to play a part. I have found that the best way to maximise the chances of rebloom occurring in my garden is to purchase irises that are known to rebloom reliably across a wide range of climates. Thus, catalogue descriptions should ideally be considered alongside information from other sources* when seeking to purchase rebloomers for your garden.

**The online AIS Iris Encyclopedia is a reliable source for rebloom information. Each cultivar description indicates if the hybridizer registered it as a 'rebloomer'. Plus, new this autumn, notes from the '2022 Cumulative Checklist of Reblooming Irises' published by the Reblooming Iris Society have been added to applicable cultivar pages. These outline USDA zones and/or countries where rebloom has been reported.- ed.*

The coldest US climate zone in which rebloom has been reported is zone 3, which gets down to minus 40 degrees Celsius in winter. While there are understandably very few irises which will survive and rebloom in such challenging climates, the general rule of thumb is that an iris which will rebloom in a very cold climate, will also rebloom in climates warmer than that. Thus these “cold climate” rebloomers are also the irises which are likely to rebloom most reliably in any climate. Using ‘Immortality’ as an example, it reblooms in most parts of the US, and in climate zones 3-10. Rebloom has also been reported in several parts of Canada (British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario), and in England, France, Belgium, Hungary, the Netherlands and Switzerland.



‘Immortality’ reblooming October 2, 2024 in hardiness zone 5b © K. Brewitt

While selection of the right varieties is the most important first step towards seeing rebloom in your home garden, providing the right cultural conditions can also help. Rebloomers like to have as much light as possible, so will appreciate the sunniest spot in your garden. Some gardeners have also reported that close proximity to streetlights can help to trigger rebloom. Extra fertilizer may be beneficial (*right*

after initial bloom – ed.), while regular watering throughout summer can also help to limit dormancy and thus encourage rebloom.

Cautionary Note on Commercial Growers *from Kate Brewitt*

Some commercial growers include rebloom information in product descriptions on websites or on nursery plant tags, but they do not specify in which hardiness zones the iris will rebloom. For example, one Canadian website I checked indicates ‘I’m Back’ is a reblooming iris hardy in zones 3-9 and that it reblooms late summer to early fall. However, the description for ‘I’m Back’ on the AIS Iris Encyclopedia states that rebloom has been reported only in USDA zones 8 and 9 (roughly Cdn zone 9...think Victoria, B.C.). If I purchased this iris for my zone 5b garden expecting rebloom I would probably be disappointed.



‘I’m Back’ © Jeff Bennett

As gardeners look to maximize the amount of year-round colour in their gardens, reblooming irises is one way to achieve this goal. Just remember, buyer beware, and before purchasing an iris labelled ‘reblooming’, check your sources to see if the variety has been reported to rebloom in your Canadian hardiness zone.

Rebloom at Aurora Borealis Iris Garden

By Terry Laurin and Kate Brewitt

During September and November temperatures fluctuated between unseasonably warm and unseasonably cold, putting our reblooming irises through their paces. The 2024 rebloom season was the longest we have ever experienced. From early August to early December, we had irises in bloom in the garden or in a vase on the dining room table.

The Reliable Ones

There is a group of irises that never let us down and provide us with rebloom from August to November. Our garden is in zone 5b.

IB 'Precious Little Pink' (Byers by Dickey, 1995) is usually the earliest to rebloom. It rebloomed in early August then again in late September.

TB 'Summer Whitewings' (G. Percy Brown, 1960) was developing a bloom stalk when a light frost was forecasted in mid-October. Even though the bud wasn't fully formed we brought the stalk indoors where it continued to develop, blooming two weeks later.

As per usual, MTB 'Lady Emma' (F. Jones, 1986) started developing bloom stalks around Thanksgiving. By mid-November there were thirteen stalks however a hard frost (-4°C) in the forecast convinced us to bring them indoors. On December 1, while putting up the Christmas decorations, two dwindling stalks remained. Thinking they didn't fit in with the poinsettia and the Christmas cactus, they were relegated to the composter.

SDB 'Purple Joy' (Spoon, 2007) bloomed the first week of October along with MDB 'Hilda's Gift' (Spoon, 2002). Both intermittently put up bloom stalks until mid-November's call for a hard frost when we brought them indoors so we could enjoy their blooms.



November 12's bouquet of bloom stalks saved from the frost, 'Lady Emma,' Purple Joy', 'Hilda's Gift', 'Mango Parfait', and a seedling pictured on page 7.

© K. Brewitt.

This Year's Surprises

As reported in the Autumn 2024 edition of *The Iris Standard*, 'Immortality' (Zurbrigg, 1982) rebloomed for us for the first time. The nicest part was that each of the two bloom stalks had eight buds, so the iris rebloomed in the garden for over 3 weeks...we brought it indoors on October 18 to save it from a light frost...one of many in the weeks that followed.

But what really surprised us was the rebloom stalks on TB 'Stealth Fighter' (Crump, 2008) and SDB 'Gold Lantern' (Spoon, 2013). 'Stealth Fighter' is a vigorous grower for us, which is a trait of irises that tend to rebloom, but it is not a registered rebloomer...although, the WIKI indicates rebloom has been reported in USDA zone 6 (hardiness zone 7 in Canada). As for 'Gold Lantern', it is a registered rebloomer (also in USDA zone 6, Cdn zone 7) but it has never rebloomed for us. By the end of November, the clump had eight bloom stalks developing, however, they were lost to the frost. But it's good to know the potential is there and perhaps

moving the clump to a warmer, more protected location would encourage rebloom in the future.

Another surprise came from a mid-November post on ONIS' Facebook page. Tim reported that he had rebloom on 'Tickle The Ivories' (Blyth, 2002/03) which he got from the ONIS online sale a couple of years ago. Another iris that is not registered as a rebloomer however rebloom has been reported in Australia and the Netherlands. We'll have to make sure Ontario gets added to the list!



From garden in zone 6a, IB 'Tickle The Ivories' with TB 'Roselie Figge' in the background. © T. Weng

When Jack Frost Comes Calling

Since frost can happen any time after the end of September, irises that rebloom in October and November are at risk of frost damage. Sometimes we will cut the bloom stalks and put them in a vase indoors. But we usually like to see how long we can have irises in bloom outdoors. So here are some steps you can take to preserve the buds on your reblooming irises when Jack Frost comes to call.

1. Cover the stalk with a large pot or bucket to protect it. If the pot is large enough, it may cover an entire clump of MDBs or SDBs.

2. Water the entire plant before nightfall, covering it with a coat of water. The theory is that the water will freeze and protect the tissues of the plant.

There are other methods; however, these are the two we've had the most success with.

Other Challenges

Frost isn't the only threat to our reblooming irises in the autumn. There are also critters that roam our garden by night.

TB 'Mango Parfait' (Spoon, 2009) was developing a beautiful bloom stalk when the flower bud 'disappeared'. Probably an evening snack for a hungry animal. Fortunately, the plant developed three more bloom stalks, two of which were brought indoors on November 12. Thinking they were not developed enough; it was surprising to watch them continue to grow in the vase. They bloomed on November 25.



TB 'Mango Parfait' (Spoon, 2009) November 25.
© K. Brewitt

The Future is Promising

We didn't set out to hybridize for rebloom however in the end, that's what we got on two of our seedlings. Both have rebloomed in late October two years in a row. One has a lovely deep blue beard on a golden fall which has a deep burnt orange fall spot. As this is only their second year, they are still under observation, but their future is promising! (see next page)



Seedling 'Teagan' X a bee – November 5 in zone 5b.

What ONIS Facebook Friends Shared

If you want to know what irises may rebloom in your area, the ONIS Facebook page is a good place to start. Those who share their pictures will usually list their hardiness zone. If not, just ask...it's a friendly bunch of iris lovers! Here are a few posts for you to enjoy.

The individual who posted this picture commented that she'd had the iris for many years, but this was the first time it had rebloomed. Seems to be a trend this year!



TB 'Daughter Of Stars' shared November 9, in zone 6a garden. @ J. Dawson

The individual who posted the next picture said the bloom stalk had survived two hard frosts and a light snow. The one stalk which had three branches still put on a beautiful display!



TB 'Mariposa Autumn' shared November 17, in zone 5a garden. © C. Edwards

Finally, I posted this on December 8, 2024, the final stalk of 'Mango Parfait'. You can see there was snow on the ground outside the window. And no, I didn't grow it in a greenhouse!! (wink!)



TB 'Mango Parfait' taken on December 8, 2024 © K. Brewitt

Isabella Preston, Canada's First Female Hybridist

By Kate Brewitt

Isabella Preston (1881-1965) was the first female hybridist in Canada. She is a key figure in Canada's ornamental plant history, earning an international reputation as a plant breeder and leaving a legacy of beautiful flowers and trees.



Isabella Preston circa 1900s

Miss Preston emigrated to Guelph, Ontario from Lancaster, England in 1912. After working several years at the Ontario Agricultural College, in 1920 she applied for a position in the Division of Horticulture at the Central Experimental Farm (CEF) in Ottawa. Within two years she was appointed Specialist in Ornamental Horticulture. She eventually rose to the position of Dominion Horticulturalist, defying gender expectations of the time. She originated over 200 hybrids, working particularly with columbines, crab-apples, irises, lilacs, lilies, and roses. Her hybrids were disease-resistant and well suited to geographic regions within Canada, since one of the mandates of the CEF was to produce plants hardy enough to survive northern prairie winters¹.

Miss Preston's work with Siberian irises focused on an attempt to develop a superb white Siberian, the reason why many of her crosses

involved 'Snow Queen' (Barr, 1900). Some of the resulting seedlings were white but none was considered an improvement on 'Snow Queen'. 'Gatineau' became her best known Siberian, although 'Ottawa' was the first Canadian iris to receive an Award of Merit (AM) from the Royal Horticultural Society of England in 1928. During her lifetime Miss Preston received many other horticultural awards. For her work with irises, she was awarded the American Iris Society's Hybridizer Medal in 1950.



Siberian 'Ottawa' © R. Hinchcliff.



Iris Sibirica Seedlings, Ottawa, circa 1920's.

Unfortunately, like many of the older iris varieties, most of Miss Preston's irises are no longer available commercially. For this reason, Katie Deneiko, a member of the Historic Iris Preservation Society (HIPS), has decided that Miss Preston's irises are worthy of safeguarding. Through the HIPS Guardian

Gardens program, (a group of members devoted to saving, growing and sharing rare identified irises) she hopes to locate and preserve as many of Miss Preston's Siberians as possible.

What can we do to help? If you, or anyone you know, has any of Miss Preston's irises growing in their garden please contact Katie at katiefro_11@hotmail.com. At a time when plant and animal species are becoming extinct, let's help Katie achieve this worthy goal!

Further reading on Isabella Preston and the HIPS Guardian Garden program can be found using these links.

[Isabella Preston | The Canadian Encyclopedia \(footnote #1\)](#)

[Canadian Horticultural History](#) - a biography.

[A true flower child: Remembering Isabella Preston, Canada's home-grown horticulturalist - agriculture.canada.ca](#)

[Guardian Gardens | Historic Iris Preservation Society](#)



ONIS Matters **In the Months Ahead**

Get the Jump on Spring & Seedy Saturday
Toronto Botanical Garden
777 Lawrence Ave. E., Toronto.
February 22, 2025 - 10 am to 4 pm



Hope to see you at this one-day garden extravaganza with over 30 plant and garden-related vendors and exhibitors including local horticultural societies, garden clubs, and

environmental organizations. Activities include free demonstrations, houseplant sales, Master Gardener advice clinics, seed swap, and new this year, a free houseplant swap. Admission is free - \$2 donation is suggested.

For more information, visit the TBG website, [Home Page - Toronto Botanical Garden](#).



Evergreen Brick Works Seedy Weekend
550 Bayview Avenue, Toronto
March 8 & 9, 2025 - 9 am to 2 pm

Join us alongside Toronto's largest year-round farmers' market. This two-day celebration of seeds, gardening, and community will feature workshops, seed exchanges, expert talks, and more! Everyone is welcome to cultivate a shared passion for growing and sustainable living!!

For more information and directions on how to get there, visit the Brick Works website: [Brick Works \(Brick Works Homepage\) - Evergreen](#).

Welcome New & Renewing Members!

R. Purwins – Scarborough, ON

Your 2024/2025 ONIS Board

Your Board for 2024/2025 is Terry Laurin, President, Jinny Missons, VP, Lyn Hickey, Treasurer, Kate Brewitt, Secretary. All Board members can be reached by emailing just1moreiris@gmail.com.

The Iris Standard is published four (4) times a year, Winter, Spring, Summer, and Autumn. Materials submitted must be received by December 1st (Winter), March 1st (Spring), June 1st (Summer) and September 1st (Autumn). Submissions may be edited for style and clarity. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited without written permission from the editor, oniseditor@gmail.com.

Title page: IB 'Bold Stroke' Photo: K. Brewitt.