

Journal of the

INTERNATIONAL GARDEN CLUB

VOL. II

SEPTEMBER, 1918

No. 3

Iris Notes

By B. Y. Morrison



HERE are many roads of adventure for the person who wishes to explore the whole of the Genus *Iris*. For the veriest amateur, there are the myriad forms of the bearded irises; some of the more common of the water-loving species, all of them representatives of the beardless section; the inevitable Spanish Irises from the bulbous section and a few of the more common Evansias, or crested irises. And should he progress from his "veriest" estate, he can find the difficult *Oncocyclus* and *Regelia* Groups for his pains, or the less familiar members of the *Apogon* and *Evansia* Groups or the still less common members of the bulbous group. For myself, I must plead only the beginner's experience and this wholly confined to those species that are rhizomatous. Yet I make bold to commend my favorite plants to all because of the great pleasure that may be had from a little collecting and from the inevitable growth of ones critical appreciation.

The usual happening in garden collecting of iris is that the collector is overwhelmed with the charms of the bearded iris

and these with the Japanese irises take up all of his time and attention. There is a certain justice in this for it must be admitted that these two groups do make a greater garden display than most of the others and they do certainly survive longer under conditions that would dismay the more fastidious members of the family. Let us therefore examine the groups that are less commonly used before returning to the rich fields of the more familiar sections.

It is a matter of genuine regret that I cannot offer as full a report on the other groups as I should like. The pages of Mr. Dykes' *The Genus Iris* still entice me to further possessions but these are slow of accomplishment for desire always outstrips fulfilment. The results that follow are from my own experience and the pictures are of flowers from my own garden, kindly taken for me by Mr. A. A. Ruark.

Following the arrangement of the groups that is used by Mr. Dykes in the book mentioned above, the first section is that of the Beardless group and the first member is the familiar *Iris sibirica*.

IRIS SIBIRICA in all its many forms is a species easily managed by any one. It grows well in ordinary soil, that is not too full of lime and that does not suffer for lack of water in the summer. They will endure considerable drought, as I know, but the amount of bloom is markedly lessened. Personally I prefer those forms that hold their flowers well above the foliage, to the dwarfer forms. Of the latter, the variety *orientalis* of the catalogues, has the larger flowers and the more intense blue color. In regard to color alone the form Blue King is even more intense. Snow Queen is the excellent white companion variety. All of these have large falls with a rounded blade as contrasted with the narrower segments of the typical species. All of these iris should be used in large clumps and if it is possible to have them so placed that they may be seen with the light shining through them, the effect is still more exquisite.

All of the varieties seed more freely than is agreeable and the seedlings make good plants which commonly flower the second year.

IRIS DELAVAYI I cannot describe. I have both plants and seedlings but neither have flowered although they have made excellent growth.

IRIS WILSONI I do not have as yet but *Iris Forrestii* has made a splendid clump of dwarf grassy foliage and this season threw up several stalks, bearing charming yellow sibirica-like flowers. The growth is markedly slender, the leaves a vivid green, with me, about ten inches high and the flower stalks with two flowers in the terminal cluster are pale yellow with some light brown veining in the throat of the bloom. With me only hand-fertilized blooms set seed.

Like *Iris Delavayi*, both *Iris chrysographes* and *I. Clarkei* have declined to bloom although both have made excellent growth. As compared to the clumps formed by sibirica, their growth is much more open and ragged. *Iris Bulleyana*, I have not succeeded in securing as yet and *Iris prismatica* the American member of the sibirica group I do not have but in a friend's garden it grows freely with *Iris versicolor* and *I. Pseudacorus* in low wet ground.

The California irises are still an experiment with me. Knowing them from a one-time California residence, I can vouch for their beauty. Here in the east, I have had a small plant of *Iris Douglasiana* which has lived through two eastern winters; it has not however adjusted itself to the new garden as well as other plants obtained this spring. These have been far more gracious so that already I have fair clumps of several color forms of *Douglasiana* and of *Iris macrosiphon*. *Iris longipetala* has been even more rapid in its acceptance of the new situation. The first two are dwarf species, with evergreen foliage that is characteristically tough and wiry. The root system from the thin hard rhizomes is very meager so that transplanting is difficult. The flowers are rather like those of *Iris tenax*, but are carried on less slender stems. The colors range from almost pure white through pale yellow to flesh or lavender, with some deep lilac and blue forms. In the California garden the pale forms were most abundant and more vigorous, but this is not always the case. For *I. macro-*

siphon I cannot speak from experience. Mr. Dykes' figure shows a flower resembling *Douglasiana* in general aspect but with the long perianth tube that is the mark of the species. *Iris tenax* another Pacific Coast species, I have from seed only. Two small clumps represent the total result of a packet of seed. The plants have done well, even in the cold winter of 1917. The foliage is evergreen, about eight inches high, very slender not more than one-eighth inch in width. The flower stalks are very slight and bear a terminal head with two flowers. The one seedling that has bloomed for me is a deep reddish pink color with the characteristic white markings below the tiny yellow blotch under the style arm. It is most dainty and should make a good subject for the front of the perennial border. There is a considerable range of color from the deep reds to almost pure whites. *Iris longipetala* is a delightful iris with tall very tough leaves and strong stalks bearing flowers of a most delightful shade of pale lavender. The segments are narrow and have a characteristic twist that gives them a very airy and graceful poise.

IRIS STYLOSA and its varieties is in a group that I have long wished to try but could not obtain until this spring. The plants suffered greatly in the moving, as they, too, have very slender rhizomes and scanty roots. The single flowers of the white form that survived to bloom was a very pure and shining white.

The great group to which *Iris spuria* belongs is one which I believe should be used more commonly in gardens, especially those where water can be freely supplied in the late spring and early summer. The plants form large clumps of stout foliage and bear strong stalks of bloom. These vary greatly in relation to the height of the foliage but do not commonly overtop the leaves to any great extent nor are they hidden among them. One of the group is *Iris Gueldenstaedtiana*, a form with the most narrow segments of any, perhaps the least attractive of all the varieties. Belonging to this group aside from the lavender forms of *spuria*, there is the lovely *Iris orchroleuca* with white to sulfur flowers bearing a good orange blotch on the falls; *Iris aurea*

with large golden yellow flowers and *Iris Monnerii* another yellow form. Then, too, there are the intermediate hybrids between these yellow and lavender forms. The great objection to the entire lot is that they resent moving and are likely to sulk for a year after the move. Another member of this group is *Iris graminea*, a small and not showy flower that I cherish for its perfume. It is easily handled, growing anywhere and bearing the short stalks of flowers half-hidden among the leaves. The perfume is very much like that of ripe apricots and is much enjoyed when the flowers are picked for table decoration. This iris like all of the apogons is very beautiful when picked and arranged in shallow bowls together with its foliage, all held in place by some one of the Japanese flower holders.

IRIS LAEVIGATA is a charming iris with all the grace of the species and is not to be confused with *Iris Kaempferi* and its hybrids. In Japan it is commonly grown in the temple gardens on the margins of ponds in very shallow water that can be drained off in winter. In summer it forms great mats of foliage, resembling *Pseudacorus*, with the large flowers of intense blue throughout the mass. There are also white forms, whites with a flush of lavender on the style arms, the lavender spotted form known as *I. albo-purpurea* and various reddish purple forms that are most unattractive. My plants have grown well but have not flowered to date. Seed germinated better the second year after sowing and the seedlings have grown well.

I am not sure that I have seen the wild type of *Iris Kaempferi*. Its garden hybrids are familiar to all. Given full sun, plenty of water and rich soil, they flourish madly. For myself, I prefer the white forms, single and double together with those which are delicately veined on a white ground. One especial white that I treasure is known by the Japanese name, Zama-no-mori. It has immense white petals, three in number, each with the faintest blue clouding below the primrose blotch. One other with the name, Kyodaisan, is the most delicate of pale blue selfs. Of the veined sorts, Iso-no-nami, is a typical example of those veined with blue lavender and Shokko-nishiki, one veined with red lavender. Nearly all of these veined kinds



IRIS FOLIOSA

have dark style arms so that there is a striking contrast to the pale spreading petals. But in these matters, nearly everyone has a different feeling about the colors so that it is scarcely safe to be too dogmatic in the matter of varieties.

Returning to American species from the south we have, *Iris foliosa* a dwarf plant with a widely running rhizome and great pale blue lilac flowers borne nestling among the leaves. *Iris hexagona* shows similar growth but has not bloomed as yet. *Iris fulva* forms tall clumps from which rise the branching stalks bearing the curious dull terra-cotta colored flowers. Common over much of the east is *Iris versicolor*, this comes in several variations of which one is *Fosteri* with pointed falls and suggesting the more solid color at the tips of the falls. Variety *Kermisian* is similar but of a distinctly reddish purple color. Both of these varieties are open to the objection that there is a greater mass of plant than of bloom but the flowers are very charming for cutting. Mr. Dykes refers back to this species, the *Iris caroliniana* of Watson. If not distinct botanically, for the gardener and collector there is an interesting difference in color, with much cleaner veining of clear blue lilac on an almost white ground and the yellow blotches confined to a definite area as in the Japanese irises. There is some interesting variation among collected plants in regard to color, especially as to the size and shape of the blotch, which may give some useful material in breeding.

IRIS TRIPETALA. From the south I have also an interesting iris which is of especial value to me in its late blooming, for the flowers come with the last of the Japanese iris about the middle of June. It is a curious plant with a straggling open growth and very slender leaves. The flower stalks are about ten inches in height scarcely overtopping the leaves and bear a terminal head of pale lavender flowers, flushed with deeper color. Like *Iris setosa*, this flower is conspicuous in that the standards are greatly reduced.

From the mountains of the south also comes *Iris verna* a delightful small iris which shows its small vivid blue lavender flowers before the leaves have pushed to their full growth.



IRIS TRIPETALA

The flowers are marked by a small but bright orange blotch and by a delightful but not strong perfume. The flowers are borne almost on the level of the earth so that they are of garden value only in mass at the front of the border.

Aside from the Japanese and Siberian irises the most common apogon is *Iris Pseudacorus* the European counterpart of our own *I. versicolor*. This is most easily raised in any situation for although a water loving kind it will flourish in very dry situations. There is great variation in the shape of the falls and only plants with large size should be kept. There are several pale ivory to primrose colored forms as well as the typical bright yellow form. It is a beautiful plant, forming a large sheaf of sturdy dark green leaves through which shine out the brilliant yellow flowers. As it seeds pestiferously, the flower stalks should be cut off as soon as the last bloom has withered.

One other iris of the beardless section I have and that is *Iris ensata*, the common iris of the Orient. My seedling plants are making good growth but have not reached the size for blooming. In the wild it forms great mats or tussocks from the persistent fibrous remains of the leaves. Through these push yearly the new growths, the flowers coming close to the ground and soon overtopped and hidden by the leaves. The flowers that I have seen are rather dull affairs, but I have read that there are forms that are more desirable. At any rate there is a considerable difference in the ultimate height of the leaves.

Evansia Group

Leaving the Apogon irises, the next group is that called Evansia. In these irises the mark that sufficiently distinguishes them for the gardener is the crest that is found on the falls. (See *Iris tectorum*). For our purposes we can dismiss the charming but tender *Iris japonica* and start with the lovelier *Iris tectorum*. In my garden this iris suffers much from the freezing of its evergreen foliage. In old plants the clumps are disfigured by the leaves half-browned till blossom time, but seedlings, which are easily raised, recover much more



IRIS TECTORUM

quickly and soon hide all with lush new growth. The leaves are very broad and of a noticeably yellow green color. The branching flower stalks rise well above them bearing the charming blue lavender blossoms, dashed with deeper color and showing the white crest. Seed sets freely, germinates readily and a fair percentage of the seedlings bloom the second year. I have found no variations. Mr. Dykes figures a flower the result of a cross with the Loppio variety of Cengialti. I have found that *tectorum* pollen with me does not give a large per cent of seed on pogoniris crosses but I have this year a good number of pods with pogoniris pollen on *tectorum*. The results were pods of malformed seed.

IRIS MILESII is too new a resident of my garden to report. It has a stouter rhizome than *tectorum* and darker leaves. The flowers are said to be red purple and less beautiful than *tectorum*.

IRIS GRACILIPES is a delightful small iris for the semi-shady border, or better the rock garden. It forms tufts of slender yellow green foliage from which rise the delicate sprays of rosy lavender flowers.

The other member of this group, easily obtained, is our own *Iris cristata*. It is easily handled if not overrun by stronger perennials and soon forms large mats, from which rise in the early spring the charming lavender flowers with the marking of white and yellow. It is easily increased by division. This year my plants are seeding but I am told that the seeds are slow of germination and often perish quickly because they are so slight and susceptible to any drought.

The next group is the difficult Oncocyclus Group. I can offer no report on this for I have ventured only three species. *Iris susiana* did well for a few years and then perished. As it is easily replaced the tragedy is only temporary. There is much difference of opinion as to the beauty of the flower for the colors are distinctly dull, but the venation is so exquisite and the size of the bloom so impressive that I like to have it. The only other species that I have flowered is *Iris iberica* which is truly wonderful for the delicate venation of the standards and the deep



PARVAR, AN ONCOCYCLUS-
POGONIRIS HYBRID

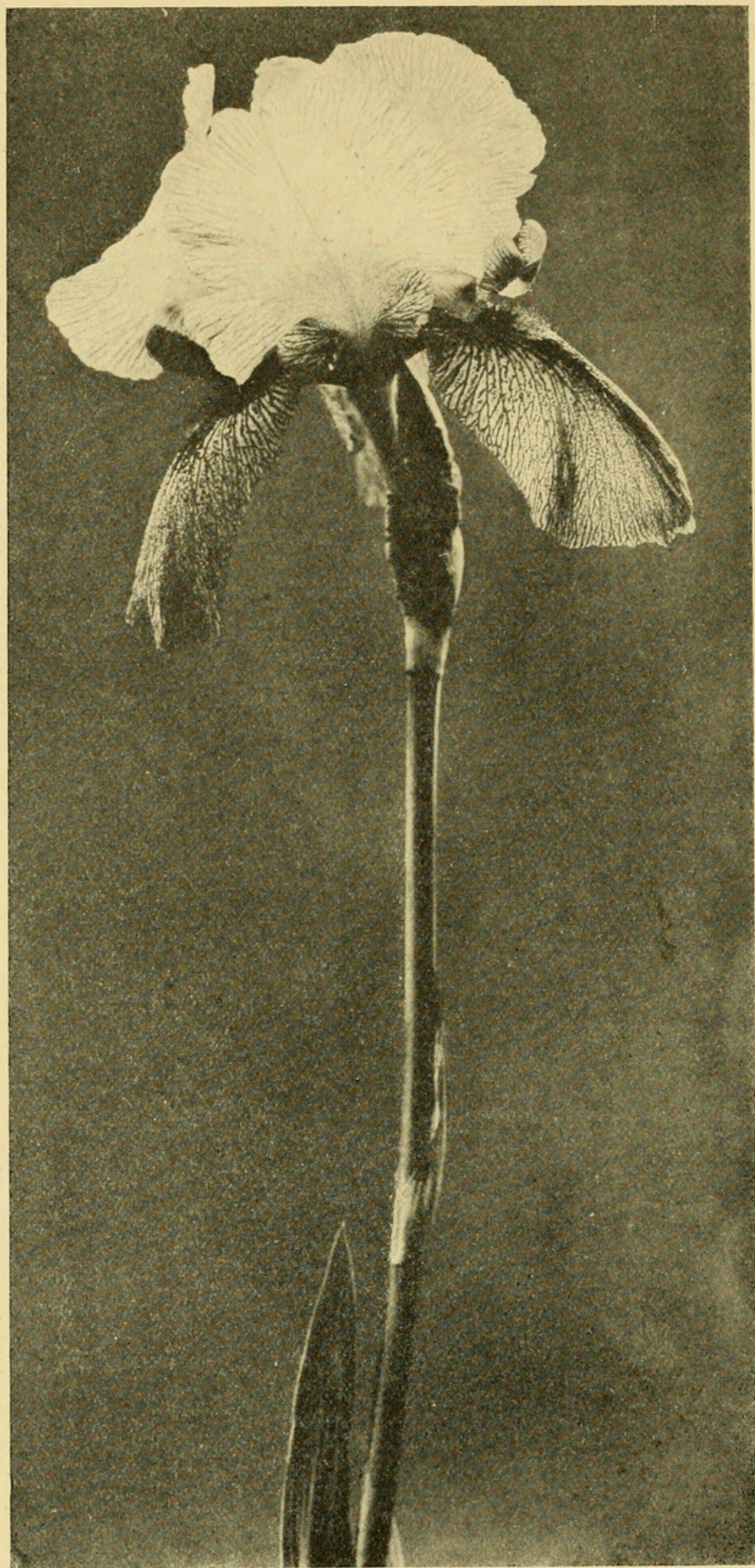
rich velvety patch on the falls. But this too sulks and although I have many plants they are not happy with me under conditions calculated to give them their enforced autumn rest. *Iris Gatesi* I have kept for two years only to lose it over night for no reason at all. So that the members of this group give one either rich reward or nothing at all for his pains.

But there are in the market a number of hybrids with various pogoniris. Two are illustrated with this paper. They are both the work of the late Sir Michael Foster. *Parvar* is a cross between *I. paradoxa* and *variegata* as is shown in the small horizontal falls; *Dilkash* is, I believe, a *pallida* \times *iberica* seedling and a beautiful one it is. The large flowers have the most exquisite veining and dotting over both standards and falls. The colors run from blue lavender to red purple, even to black in the small patch where the veins are confluent. These two, with *Parsam* and *Paracina* have grown and increased slowly for me. One other, The Dove, of which *I. lupina* is one parent, barely holds its own. I have missed seeing the bloom each year.

Similar to these but less sure are the various *Oncocyclus-Regelia* hybrids that are in the trade. These have a better constitution than the parent *Oncocyclus* but are not very certain at best. Of the varieties that I have seen I care most for Mars, in which the venation is a clear deep blue on a white ground.

The *Regelia* irises are almost as thankless as the *Oncocyclus* species. I have had only the forms of *Iris Korolkowi* which are distinct in the form of the segments and in the type of venation. The latter is obscured somewhat by the color in the form shown. *Iris Leichtlini* gave several very beautiful iridescent blooms and then perished with but one exception which seems ready to follow suit. The flowers are bronzy flushed with purple.

This year I have from an American hybridizer a number of varieties, crosses between *Iris Korolkowi* and *Pogoniris*, I believe. The rhizomes show markedly the *Korolkowi* blood and excite great curiosity for the coming spring and their flowering. The same grower has also some *Susiana* hybrids which look promising.



DILKASH, AN ONCOCYCLUS-
POGONIRIS HYBRID



IRIS KOROLOKOWI
ATROPURPUREA

Omitting the section of the Pseudoregelias, of which I have no member, there remains only the great section of the Pogoniris or the bearded irises, for I have no intent to discuss any of the bulbous forms of iris. Here is the happy hunting ground for the beginner and for the collector of discrimination. The history of the development and improvement of these irises is long and the beginnings obscure; moreover, the final issue is by no means as yet. This spring I went carefully over a large collection of varieties representing most of the stock of one of the large growers in this country and I feel sure that in ten years time there will be no excuse for growing more than five of the varieties in it, unless it be for historical purposes. In size, and habit they have been superseded and in color they have been either improved or duplicated in better forms. But even today these new aspirants are by no means certain of their places for daily new ones come to the front.

In the old gardens and often in the beginnings of amateurs collections today, there are first the old blue and the Florentine, with Maori King perhaps and a clump of the excellent Pallida Dalmatica. Now there are myriads. All the members of the Pogoniris group are interesting, but to the gardener many of the species are of less value than their offspring. Culturally all are sun and lime lovers and object to crowding and deep planting.

For the choice of the gardener today there are as I have said many forms. Early begins the show with the dwarf species, none of which are so very important except for botanical interest although *Iris statellae*, primrose yellow and its variety *olbiensis*, claret purple, are very charming. Next come the results of the interbreeding of these forms and species, the so-called Alpines and Crimeans of the catalogues. Here it is a matter of taste. The best program is to visit a nursery at blooming time and choose the forms that appeal most. In this way many of the greenish yellows and dull purple-yellows may be avoided. Following them is the group of Intermediate Irises. These are real iris but not so beautiful as the later forms. For myself, I still cherish, Ingeborg, a large gray white; Walhalla, with

standards blue and falls red purple; Halfdan, ivory yellow; Gerda, dull brownish yellow, and Dorothea, a gray white flushed with lavender. Ivorine, white to greenish.

After these come the great mass of the tall bearded irises, early and late. For my own "less choice" border I still must have Florentine, old Common Blue, Kharput, Amas and Fontarabie, as they are all early and different.

But from here on each person must choose for himself. In the following list I have ventured a selection as I would have it today if I might buy without limit. Those printed in small capitals only are the varieties that I believe will not be displaced by better forms.

Whites: Albicans, Florentina, Innocenza, LA NEIGE, KASHMIR WHITE.
Yellows: Flavescens, DAWN, Shelford Yellow, Aurea, Mrs. Neubronner, SHEKINAH.

Blue to lavender: PALLIDA DALMATICA, Juniata, CYPRIANA CATERINA, Celeste, Albert Victor, Rembrant, Tinae.

Pink to claret: Mrs. Alan Gray, Her Majesty, Queen of May, DREAM, ISOLINE, EDUOARD MICHEL, PARC DE NEUILLY.

Bicolors: Anne Leslie, Victorine, Thorbecke, Loreley. IRIS KING, MAGNATE, MERLIN, Premier, PROSPER LAUGIER, ALCAZAR, ARCHEVEQUE, Nine Wells, Whiffenpoof, ORIFLAMME, Monsignor, Baronet, Lent B. Williamson.

Frills: ANNA FARR, E. L. CRANDALL, JEANNE D'ARC, COUNT DE ST. CLAIR, Parisiana, Ma Mie.

Blends: Eldorado, Afterglow, MAD. CHERI, ENSIGN, Nue D'Orage.

I realize perfectly that this list will not, cannot be satisfactory to everyone, but I do feel very strongly that it does contain the cream of the newer iris as they are coming to the trade and so far as I know them. What will be in store for us from the continued work of the hybridizers remains to be seen. Perhaps in less time than I now think for all of these varieties will have to be retired in favor of newer and better forms.



Morrison, B. Y. 1918. "Iris Notes." *Journal of the International Garden Club* 2(3), 307–323.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/82623>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/334031>

Holding Institution

UMass Amherst Libraries (archive.org)

Sponsored by

UMass Amherst Libraries

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Not provided. Contact Holding Institution to verify copyright status.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.