



American Iris Society

Colorado

Region 20

**Shows, Tours, Sales, Judge's
Training, and Substantive Articles**

Winter 2008



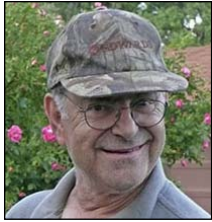
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Front cover photo, *Close Up*, 'City of Paris,' by Richard Nolde. Inside front cover photo, by Glenn Guenterberg, taken in his front garden. Foreground tall bearded 'Ring Around Rosie,' background siberian 'Over In Glory Land.'

For ad placement or article submittal information contact Glenn Guenterberg (editor) or Patrice Van Vleet (production and design layout), at clrimage@comcast.net or call Clear Images Design & Photography at 303-979-0935. Address: 10387 Totem Run, Littleton, CO 80125-9008.

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The (Acting) RVP's Fall 2008 Message

By Stephen Blecher

Hello Everybody,

The 2008 growing season was exceptionally good. The weather in April was relatively cool, and the irises didn't bloom too early, so there was very little frost damage and a long bloom season. Roses, daylilies, and tomatoes also did very well. This year's iris sale was very successful, netting about twice as much money as last year, thanks to the work of sale volunteers and generous contributions of rhizomes from our members. For 2008 the Board adopted a tight budget, and for the first time in several years, our income and expenditures are roughly in balance.

At the fall meeting we postponed the election of officers for 2009 because we were still searching for an RVP candidate. I'm happy to report that Betty Roberts is now running for the office of RVP. She has been RVP previously, has held chairmanships in Region 20 for many years, and has served on the National Board of the AIS. The election will be held at the winter meeting on Saturday, February 28. Our speaker will be Paul Black, co-owner of Mid-America Garden in Oregon, and one of the world's leading iris hybridizers. We will mail announcements as the meeting date approaches, and the time, location, and directions are on our Web site. Paul Black is very much in demand as a speaker, and Betty Roberts has succeeded in persuading him to accept our invitation.

The Board plans to reorganize Region 20 to be similar to other AIS regions. A typical region consists of a regional board, headed by an RVP, that acts as liaison between the local affiliate clubs and the national AIS. The RVP represents the region at national conventions. Region 20 comprises all of Colorado, so all AIS members in the state automatically are members of Region 20, whether or not they belong to a local affiliate. Local affiliates are autonomous and conduct iris shows, sales, tours, programs, and other activities. For many years Region 20 has been both a regional organization and a Denver area affiliate. This organizational structure has placed dual responsibilities on the board and RVP and, though that has worked reasonably well, it is not the most efficient situation. So we have taken action to separate the responsibilities of the Region 20 RVP and board from the detailed administration of the Denver area club. This reallocation of responsibilities will reduce the burden on the RVP by focusing on administering regional affairs. A new Denver area affiliate, responsive to the needs of iris enthusiasts in the

Metro area, will be organized to put on shows, programs, and the other iris activities that we enjoy. Come to the organizational meeting on March 7 at 1 p.m.; the location will be announced. At the upcoming February 28 meeting we will describe these plans in detail. Contact me at sblecher@comcast.net or 303-798-9103 for questions and comments.

Sincerely, Stephen Blecher, The (Acting) RVP for Region 20 AIS

Editor's Message

By Glenn Guenterberg



The garden had been put to bed for a long winter's night. The tools were put away for the season. Then it happened again. Interesting articles appeared and this newsletter overflows with all the iris news that's fit to print. This is a full-color digital issue published as a PDF file and posted on the Region 20 Web site. The spring issue will be printed and mailed as usual. The amazing PDF format allowed us to load this issue with color photos from many club events, all at no cost and in a file size optimized for viewing on your computer screen. Color photo-montages will remind you of good times at the Denver and Elmohr iris shows, the Denver garden tour (thanks to Lisa Story, Steve Blecher, Richard Nolde, and Bob Van Liere), and the Denver iris sale at Hudson Gardens.

A hearty thank you to Steve Blecher for serving as Region 20 RVP for three years, then graciously continuing for a fourth year as Acting RVP! The year ended on a bright note: strong sale proceeds have reversed a trend of declining reserves and Betty Roberts has agreed to be the RVP candidate in the election at the winter meeting on February 28.

Come to the Denver winter meeting on Saturday, February 28 to make your vote count and to hear noted iris hybridizer Paul Black talk about median irises (especially SDBs), SDB hybridizing, and the work he is doing with small-flowered tall bearded irises. And remember to attend the Elmohr luncheon meeting on Saturday, March 14, featuring iris hybridizer and past president of the AIS, Terry Aitken.

We plan to publish more articles from the Colorado affiliate clubs. Write those articles during the quiet winter months. The **deadline for the spring newsletter is March 3**. We value your comments. Check the Region 20 Web site at <http://www.geocities.com/aisregion20/>, for the latest club news, updated events calendar, newsletters, and local hybridizer pages.

Announcements

Welcome to Every One of Our New Members — welcome!

We look forward to meeting each of you. Plan to attend a presentation by one of the world's leading iris hybridizers. Paul Black, from Mid-America Garden, will be the speaker at the winter Region 20 meeting on February 28 (details on page 6). Or, maybe we'll meet you at our next local garden tour, at a Hudson Gardens volunteer work party, or in Kansas City, at the 2009 National AIS Convention. For club events check the calendar on page 6.



New member Joanne Hunter, artist and iris lover, enjoying, along with other members, this summer's Region 20 iris garden tour.

Victoria Anderson, from Aurora
Jacqueline Clark, from Loveland
Kathy East, from Highlands Ranch
Tasha Groves, from La Junta
Steve Gums, from Peyton
Sue and David Hosier, from Morrison
Joanne Burney Hunter, from Centennial
Dawn McCarthy, from Brighton
Barbara Metcalfe and Mary Brown, from Highlands Ranch
Dorothy Mullins, from Colorado Springs
Kay Sager, from Lakewood
Daniel Schwaniger, from Westminster
W.H. Speaker, from Clark
Wilton and Ruth Webb, from Golden

A Very Special Thank You to All Who Contributed to This Edition

Your willingness to share, write articles, and contribute photos, is much appreciated; this newsletter would not exist without you — thank you!

Stephen Blecher	Catherine Long Gates	Richard Nolde
Lynda Love	Jackie Goodwin	Betty Roberts
Rose McClain	Kayellen R. Daily	Lowell Baumunk

Financials and Board Meetings

If you would like to obtain the 2009 approved operating budget or the financial statement summary, please contact Suzanne McCarthy, the Region 20 treasurer, at hockeynutteh@comcast.net.

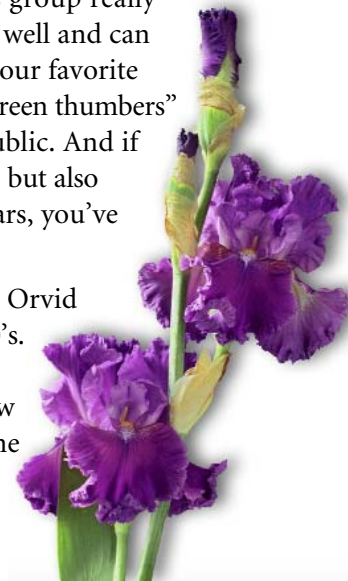
For a copy of the board meeting notes, please contact Lisa Story, the Region 20 secretary, at lisaraystory@comcast.net.

Nina Winegar Award – Leading by Example

By Catherine Long Gates

During the over 30 years that Lois and Orvid Olson have been members of Region 20, they have set a fine example. An organization needs people that can be counted on. Folks are needed to help with the show, the sale, garden tours, and meetings. An iris group really needs people who know how to grow iris well and can instruct others in the care and feeding of our favorite flower. It's especially helpful when those "green thumbs" are willing to open their garden to the public. And if that garden is not only expertly cultivated, but also displays an up to date collection of cultivars, you've hit the jackpot!

Region 20 hit the jackpot when Lois and Orvid decided to join our ranks in the early 1970's. Aside from all their contributions to the group they've also set a fine example of how to hybridize top-notch iris in a small home garden. Lois' 'Tintinnabulation,' shown here, received an Honorable Mention award in 1998 and has been followed by several fine cultivars with more in the wings.



To acknowledge their support and leadership the Olsons were presented with the Nina Winegar award



at the fall 2008 regional meeting. The Winegar award honors those who have contributed to Region 20 over a long period of time. Named for our first RVP, it recognizes those folks who have helped to foster

this group in a myriad of ways. Congratulations and thanks to Lois and Orvid for their part in guiding Region 20 to its 60th anniversary!

2009 Region 20 Events Calendar

Date	Sponsor	Event (Contacts listed at bottom of page)
Sat. Feb 28 1 P.M.	Region 20 Open to public No lunch	Winter General Meeting , Paul Black, a renowned hybridizer, will be the speaker. Location: Daniels Fund Building, at 101 Monroe St., North Cherry Creek.
Tue. Mar 3	Loomis	Planning Committee Meeting , Karen's office, Ordway.
Sat. Mar 7 1 P.M.	Region 20 ALL members	Organizational Meeting — discuss and form a new Denver metro area iris club. Location: TBD, check mailing & Web.
Sat. Mar 14 12 P.M.	Elmohr Open to public	Luncheon Mtg. Rockrimmon brch library, Col. Spr. Speaker: Terry Aitken, famous hybridizer and owner of Salmon Creek Garden in Vancouver, Washington.
Sat. Apr 11 12 P.M.	Elmohr Open to public	Luncheon Mtg. Rockrimmon brch library, Colorado Springs Speaker: TBD
Sat. May 9 12 P.M.	Elmohr Open to public	Luncheon Mtg. Rockrimmon brch library, Colorado Springs Speaker: TBD
Sun. May 17 6 A.M. 10 A.M. 1 P.M.	Loomis Open to public	Flower Show , show set up and meet to groom bloom stalk in Gobin Building Judging starts Gobin in Depot Plza, Main St, Rocky Ford



It's fun, garden, laugh, talk together – come help!

Thank you to all past volunteers. If you've helped before or never have, please consider volunteering with our Hudson Gardens spring display bed cleanup. Contact Steve Blecher for dates & times.

Jane Flannery, volunteering at Hudson Gardens.

Event-Related Contacts

Region 20 questions, contact Stephen Blecher, 303-798-9103

Iris Garden Tour, Lisa Story, 303-233-8354

Elmohr questions, call Jackie Goodwin, 719-630-0595

Elmohr's Loomis Test Garden, Russ Eacker, 719-633-5193

Loomis questions, contact Rose McClain, 719-254-3462



Tooltime!

By Catherine Long Gates

Our fall 2008 Region 20 meeting brought a change of venue and a delightful change of pace for the program. Sandy Snyder not only presented the program, but graciously hosted the meeting at her very welcoming garden in Littleton. Just a hop, skip, and a jump from long time member Tom Magee's garden, it has the same south facing slope and like Tom's it has been artfully constructed to use that slope to full advantage with a descending series of patios, paths, and garden rooms.

After a meeting and pot-luck held on one patio, Sandy led the group to a work area where she gave an entertaining and humorous "show and tell" about many of her favorite gardening tools. Sandy's tools ranged from the multi-purpose Japanese hori-hori knife she always keeps at her side, to the slip on boot covers for covering up muddy garden shoes for those quick trips into the house, to the traditional shovels & rakes, to a great pruning blade to convert your Sawzall into a mighty pruner (now on this author's wish list), to the really big tools – a chipper shredder to deal with all those prunings and make great mulch for pathways. A few members also brought some of their favorite tools including RVP Steve Blecher who demonstrated his homemade long handled, no-stoop, easy on the back weeder.

In order to do their jobs, good tools must be properly cared for and stored. Neatly tucked off to one side, Sandy's tool shed provides the requisite storage for tools and the items needed to maintain them in top form. Sandy demonstrated the ease of tool maintenance chores when there is an electric grindstone and wire brush at the ready. The grinder makes quick work of the oft neglected sharpening and cleaning chores. Some tasks are still best done by hand, like applying linseed oil to wooden handles to stave off the effects of our dry Colorado climate. A quality tool can have a long and productive life with the application of some TLC.



Our thanks to Sandy for sharing a wonderful setting and an informative program for our meeting. It was great fun to spend an afternoon in a garden tended by a masterful gardener who knows how to use tools to good advantage!

AIS Region 20 2009 Tall Bearded Iris Symposium Results

This year the format of the ballot was changed from an insert to a set of pages in which each cultivar is numbered, and the members vote by writing down the numbers corresponding to their favorite irises. This method is not as popular as marking choices on an insert, so fewer members voted. This happened in the other regions as well.

Results (Region 20 hybridizers listed in green):

<u>Votes</u>	<u>Cultivar</u>
11	H. C. Stetson (#1, photo on right), by Region 20 Hybridizer, the late Rob Stetson
9	Conjuration
8	Hello Darkness
7	Acoma (#2)
7	Crowned Heads
7	Titan's Glory
6	Dusky Challenger
6	Song of Norway
5	County of Kent (#3)
5	Laced Cotton
4	Before the Storm
4	Breakers
4	Champagne Elegance
4	Dutchman's Dream (#4)
4	Gay Parasol
4	Golden Panther
4	Joyce Terry
4	Paul Black
4	Stairway To heaven
3	Amiable
3	Brazilian Holiday
3	Edith Wolford
3	Elizabethan Age (#5)
3	Fancy Woman
3	Florentine Silk
3	Happenstance
3	High Priestess (#6)
3	Keeping Up Appearances
3	Mary Frances
3	Prague
3	Stepping Out
3	Superstition, <i>continued</i>



<u>Votes</u>	<u>Cultivar</u>
3	Supreme Sultan
3	Swingtown
3	Thornbird
3	Vanity
3	Wintry Sky

In addition, 30 cultivars received 2 votes and 35 received 1 vote.

Two Colorado Hybridizers Honored

Lowell Baumunk and Bob Van Liere struck gold in 2008. Here are the AIS awards they received for outstanding cultivars.

Congratulations Lowell and Bob!



Clarence G. White Medal*
(Aril and Arilbred):
'Byzantine Art,' (#1) L. Baumunk



Founders of Signa Medal
(Species) Runner Up:
'Petit Lion,' (#2) L. Baumunk



Award of Merit
(Aril and Arilbred):
'Rivers of Babylon,' (#3) L. Baumunk



Honorable Mention (Tall Bearded):
'Neon Mama,' (#4) L. Baumunk



'Belle de Provence,' (#5) L. Baumunk
'Sisters of Loretto,' (#6) B. Van Liere
'Solomon's Treasure,' (#7) B. Van Liere



Honorable Mention
(Intermediate Bearded):
'Barrel House Blues,' (#8) L. Baumunk



**Editor's Note: The prestigious Clarence G. White Medal is the highest honor awarded exclusively for aril and arilbred irises with half or more aril ancestry and is sanctioned by the AIS and Aril Society International. We had grown 'Byzantine Art' for several years.*

In 2007, after restoring our aril patch, 'Byzantine Art' went missing. Not to worry. A year later I found a lone rhizome, dry but happy, on a garage shelf. Now, just two months later, it is again flourishing beside other hardy desert plants in our garden. The judges had it right!



Photos of these prize irises, and many of their other introductions, can be seen on their Web sites: Lowell Baumunk's at <http://www.iriscolorado.com> and Bob Van Liere's at <http://www.iris4u.com>. Read more about the awards on the AIS awards Web page, <http://www.irises.org/awards.htm>

In Memoriam — Duane Daily

By Catherine Long Gates

Looking back over the 60 years that Region 20 has been in existence there are many names and faces that have participated in regional activities. Some of those folks stay in your memory because of a specific event or talent, but there are the precious few that remain linked with the group because of the sheer number of years and the consistency of participation during that tenure. Duane Daily was one of those stalwarts that could be counted on to show up for shows, sales, meetings, judges training, and garden tours.

For a quarter of a century Duane served as a judge, beginning as an apprentice in 1982, becoming certified as a garden judge the following year, and attaining the rank of active master judge in 1999. Until failing health forced him to change to retired status in 2007, he took that “active” part of the judge definition seriously and seldom missed a show or a judges training.



From left to right, Winifred L. Daily, Kayellen R. Daily, and Duane W. Daily.

He also took to heart the responsibility a judge has to grow and see as many irises as possible. Aside from his consistent attendance at shows and garden tours, Duane made that extra effort to visit other gardens. I can't think of a spring season that didn't come with a visit from Duane to our garden in Boulder. Often accompanied by his wife Winnifred and daughter Kayellen he studied and evaluated that season's irises. Duane's faithful participation and presence in Region 20 will be missed.

A note from Kayellen R. Daily — Duane W. Daily passed away September 16, 2007. He was a long time member of the American Iris Society. The first irises he purchased were at Long's Gardens in Boulder, Colorado out of the digging beds. Over time we purchased irises from other commercial gardens and at one time we had over 300 varieties in various sizes growing in our backyard.



A Stranger in Paradise

By Richard Nolde



I checked my garden one evening late in July and I noticed several new stalks arising from two plants. I had planted some seeds that had been distributed at the AIS fall meeting two years earlier but I didn't

remember what kind of plant they were from or who had brought them. At one point earlier in the season, I thought they might be daylilies that had colonized my seed bed. None of these plants flowered the first year after they sprouted and these stalks were decidedly thinner than those on my other irises, even my miniature tall bearded varieties. I was not prepared for the blooms that emerged from the buds. The tiny flowers, hardly more than an inch across at their widest, opened in the early evening and twisted into tightly swirled ropes as they closed before the sun came up the next morning.

I took a few digital photos and e-mailed them to my iris friends and before long Lowell Baumunk identified the stranger as the Vesper Iris. Researching this name in my iris books, I found out that the plant is now generally identified as *Pardanthopsis dichotoma*, though it is still frequently referred to as the Vesper Iris. According to Geoff Stebbings in *The Gardener's Guide to Growing Irises*, it comes from China, Manchuria, south-east Siberia, and Japan and it can vary in color from mauve to purple. In *The Gardener's Iris Book*, William Shear confirms my experience that it grows easily from seed and the blooms open rapidly, late in the day. The same plant may bloom repeatedly, and I had flowers for three weeks on just two plants. Shear suggests that there are also pure white varieties. The Vesper Iris can be crossed with



the Blackberry Lily, *Belamcanda*, to produce a hybrid often called a Candy Lily.

The flowers are easily fertilized by bees and flies and nearly all the flowers on my plants produced seed pods in spite of the fact that I rarely water and we did not get appreciable rain in July. When I dug up one of my

plants, I discovered that there are no rhizomes, only a loose tangle of roots, even after two years of growth. According to some sources, the Vesper Iris is a short lived variety that may die off after three or four years but it grows so readily from seed that new plants will naturally replace the old ones if that happens. It can be used as a decorative border plant and, if raised from seed indoors before the frosts have passed, will bloom the same year in some climates.



Give A Birthday Membership Gift

Give your family members and gardening friends in Colorado a gift membership in the American Iris Society! They'll enjoy the AIS Bulletin and will become members of Region 20, receiving our newsletter and be invited to all our interesting programs and events.

For annual membership information contact Tom Gormley at 563-513-0504 or at aismemsec@irises.org

A Few Good Irises, *Part 13* — Water

By Stephen Blecher

Water is such a simple topic. We all know that plants need water, but weather and soil conditions are so variable, that it's practically impossible to make exact recommendations, even if we restrict our discussion to Colorado.

Bearded irises are fairly forgiving. In Oregon, at the time of the 2006 Convention, they had eight consecutive days of rain, but the irises were magnificent. In Colorado, irises survive hot dry summers with only occasional watering. Like most other garden plants, irises perform best in well-drained soil, and that requires a clay content not to exceed about 30%.

In the Denver area, the clay content can be as much as 75%. Clay soil makes it very difficult to water efficiently. Too much water causes the

soil to become waterlogged, depriving the roots of air, and inviting rot. Too little water, especially in hot weather, causes the subsoil to become dry and hard, so the roots can't penetrate, thus making the plants more vulnerable to stress.

If you have clay soil, the only long-term fix is to replace it with a good topsoil mix from a local sand and gravel dealer. Assuming that you have well drained soil, it's easy to work out the proper amount of water. From April through the middle of June irises require a steady and fairly generous supply of water to ensure rapid growth and profuse bloom. It's better to water more deeply and less frequently than the other way around. The top couple of inches of soil should be allowed to dry out between watering sessions. In addition, a day after watering dig a small hole about a foot deep to check subsoil moisture. If the subsoil hasn't dried out, you don't need to increase the amount of water. Do this once every two or three weeks during the growing season. In the middle of summer it's usually safe to cut back on water provided the subsoil is not allowed to become bone dry.

In the middle of summer newly planted rhizomes need more water than established plants, so you can conserve water by planting new rhizomes in gallon pots until the weather cools off a little. Place the pots in a location where they will get mostly morning sun. Move the new plants into the garden about Labor Day, and provide enough water to keep the beds from drying severely in the fall. As the days get cooler, less water will be needed, but irises will continue to grow actively until the end of October.

If the beds get a lot of sun during the winter, you may need to water a few times when the weather is relatively warm. Do not plant irises in a location that's subject to freezing and thawing cycles, or where ice accumulates. This is death on irises, particularly new rhizomes.

A cardinal rule for bearded irises is never to water too much. If you are uncertain, it's safer to keep them on the dry side until it's fairly obvious that they need more water.

Footnote: I'm not very familiar with drip irrigation systems, but the CSU Extension Service states that a well-designed drip irrigation system is 90% efficient, compared with 50 to 70% for sprinklers. If any members are using a drip system for growing irises we would very much appreciate an article describing your methods. Water is becoming increasingly scarce, so more efficient methods will someday be a necessity.



Region 20 Show Report, May 25, 2008

By Betty Roberts, Show Chairperson

Number of Exhibitors: 13

Number of Entries: 113

Number of Varieties
and Cultivars: 113



'Brazilian Holiday'

Best Specimen of Show: 'Brazilian Holiday,'
TB Exhibited by Stephen Blecher

Seedling Judged Most Worthy:
Number 98-14A, BB by Dave Miller

Silver Medal (most blue ribbons, Horticultural Entries):
Lois & Orvid Olson

Bronze Medal (second-most blue ribbons, Horticultural Entries):
Stephen Blecher

Best Design of Show: Exhibited by Betty Roberts

Best Design of Show Winner of Sweepstakes for Artistic Designs:
Betty Roberts



'Oyez'

Best of Section A (TB): Stephen Blecher for
'Brazilian Holiday'

Best of Section C (SDB): Stephen Blecher for
'Bluebeard's Ghost'

Best of Section F (MTB): Becky Schlottach for
'Spun Gold'

Best of Section Q (MDB): Lowell Baumunk
for 'Oyez'

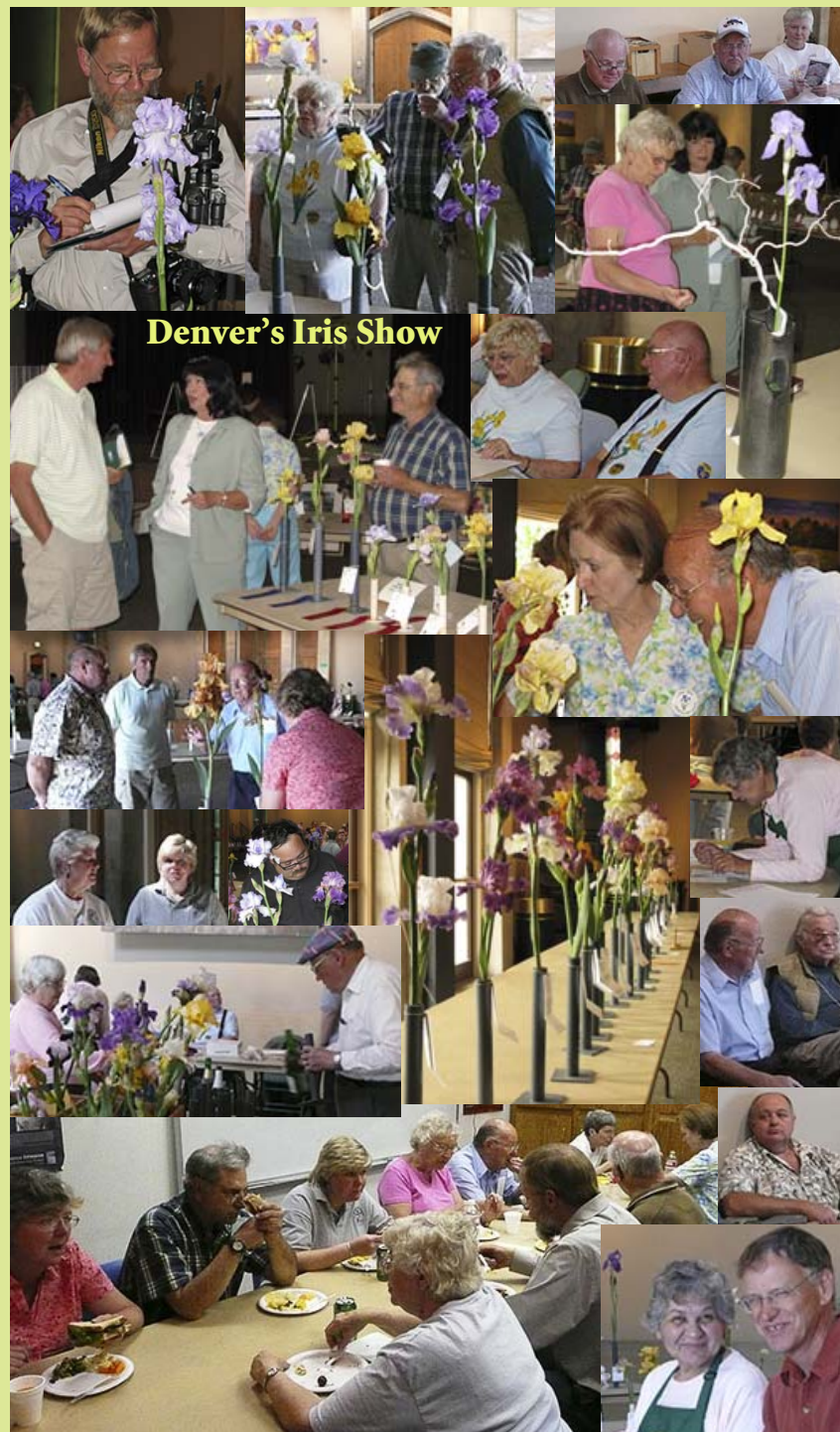
Region 20 Awards

Best Historic: Becky Schlottach for 'Spun Gold'

Best Intermediate Bearded: Marty Artzberger for 'Aurora's Blush'

The Region 20 Shows

Region 20 iris shows in Denver and Colorado Springs attracted a steady flow of interested gardeners to see prime iris specimens and artistic arrangements. Spring moisture, an exceptional growing season, and lots of TLC paid off with fine displays as you will see in the show photo albums on the next two pages.



Denver's Iris Show



Elmohr's Iris Show

2008 Tour of the Gardens

Denver Iris Gardens On Tour — As you will see from the photo-montage, the 2008 Region 20 garden tour — on a sunny day in May — attracted many smiling members to the gardens of Steve Blecher, Richard Nolde, Bob Van Liere, and the club display bed at Hudson Gardens. Thanks iris gardeners, enthusiasts, and tour organizer, Lisa Story, for making the day a success.



Region 20 members admiring Steve Blecher's Littleton garden, photos left & below.

Evidently, Richard Nolde applied his green thumb and other closely-held secrets to his bountiful iris beds, on tour for the first time, blended photos directly below.



Bob Van Liere's expansive garden, right & below right, a perennial favorite.



Region 20 iris display beds at Hudson Gardens, immediately below.





One-Day July Iris Sale – A Resounding Success

The word is out . . . enthusiastic gardeners from all over the Denver metro area came and bought, and bought, and bought – their favorite irises at the Region 20 sale held for the third year at Hudson Gardens in Littleton. They received personalized service from club volunteers and walked out with armloads of rhizomes, as you can see here. Good weather, intense advertising, volunteers, and fair prices brought lots of customers and made the sale a success.





Somewhere, Over the Rainbow Part 2

By Richard Nolde

Editor's Note: Part 1 of this engaging article was published in the spring 2008 newsletter. Refresh your memory by reading it again.

As I expanded my iris beds to the back yard, I found out that the difference in intensity between morning sun, amplified by the surrounding concrete and brick, and the afternoon sun that strikes the back yard, can cause the same variety to bloom two weeks earlier in my front yard. In the same bed, those irises that are shaded by the crabapple tree bloom after those that are not shaded. By having a variety of kinds of irises, dwarfs to tall bearded, and locating them in different parts of the yard, I have irises in bloom from late March until early June. I also have a few varieties of irises that bloom again in July, August, September, or even October, if conditions are right. An iris that blooms more than once in a good season might bloom only once if the moisture is too limited or the temperature too hot in another year, or it might bloom twice in one part of the yard but not in another.

When building a new iris bed, I add compost and sphagnum peat moss to the soil. If there is a lot of clay where I am constructing the bed, I add coarse sand. I find the easiest way to get a bed ready is to remove everything of value and then run my tiller through it to break everything up and mix in the compost, peat moss, and sand. I like to till the soil at least 8 inches deep to get rid of any tree roots and odds and ends of weeds and grasses when I am reclaiming lawn for new beds. I cannot believe how resistant crab grass can be to being covered with dirt, and bind weed is impossible to get rid of without a strong herbicide. Having tilled the entire bed until the dirt is loose and well broken up, I prepare to plant each iris by digging down deeper than the length of the roots and burying a teaspoon or so of



Jeanette Pryor discussing iris with Richard in his back yard, viewed through the apple tree.



granular fertilizer. This cache seems to give the plant a good start and lasts quite a while. Since I use bark mulch on my beds, I prefer to use a liquid fertilizer on established beds rather than pulling the mulch back to apply granular fertilizer. My

theory is that every time you disturb the mulch you are inviting weeds to take root in the exposed soil. Some people advocate using bone meal when planting new beds but I have found that animals may dig up the plants going after the bone meal buried below them. Alfalfa pellets from a feed store are also a good choice for new beds.

My own preferences for fertilizer lean toward formulations higher in phosphorus and lower in nitrogen under the premise that this will encourage blooms over excessive foliage growth. After two years of random experimentation with different fertilizers and dosages, I sent a soil sample to the Colorado Agricultural Extension service for analysis. The money for the analysis was well spent. A good soil analysis can save you from buying expensive fertilizers that you don't need. Whether from past applications of fertilizer or naturally occurring deposits, I have more than enough potassium in my soil and a neutral pH that is well suited to growing irises. Unlike nitrogen, potassium doesn't leach out of the soil if the plants do not use it up.



Irises and other plants surrounded by mulch in the raised beds of Richard's front yard.

Many people recommend trimming the leaves on transplanted irises and even the roots. My own practice is to only trim the dead or dried leaves and roots. The longer roots help anchor the plant in the ground when

the soil is loose. You may wish to trim the very ends of the fresh roots, but I have not seen any ill results from not doing so. I don't trim the leaves unless I am expecting high winds shortly after planting. My experience is that trimming the leaves causes the plant to dry out and go dormant whereas leaving most of them in place allows the iris to keep on growing without missing a beat. I like to plant my irises in July but I have planted irises as late as October and still had blooms on them the following spring.

It is easy to plant your rhizomes too closely when making a new bed. It is nice to have a full splash of color the next year, but with each new increase the space between the irises decreases. I make my beds wider than I would consider ideal in order to maximize the ratio of growing space to access space. However, anytime you have a bed wider than a comfortable arm's reach from one side to the center, you are asking for a sore back and shoulders when you have to lean in to clean the bed or pull weeds. Try to make your sections narrow enough that you can access most of the plants from both sides of the row. It will also be much easier to get a camera tripod between the plants for the best angle of view, if you don't plant your rhizomes cheek by jowl, or should that be fan by fanny?

Irises vary greatly in their rate of increase. Normally each rhizome will produce one increase per year on each side of the rhizome that produces the bloom stalk. I have some varieties that produce two, three or even four on each side in one year. Irises that are this prolific can get overcrowded very quickly as the extended rhizomes compete for nutrients. A rhizome may shrivel after the increases have sprouted from it or it may produce more increases from additional nodes. I have had rhizomes that were so large I was sure there were fugitive sweet potatoes hiding in my iris bed. When rhizomes multiply rapidly, you should divide them every third year even if they are still blooming well or the



Karen Tomky, Loomis secretary.

task of dividing them becomes much more difficult. I have seen irises in my neighbor's border that had not been divided for twenty years and the rhizomes were four or five layers deep, crisscrossing each other in a tightly woven mat. Amazingly, this older variety was still blooming, but this should be considered the exception rather than the rule.

It can be tempting to buy late season leftover irises from the big box stores when they are marked down. I have found this to be a bad idea. The irises that I have tried from these sources are often so dried out that they cannot be revived. I had less than a 50 percent survival rate for those that I purchased from general merchandise stores and the chances of the iris matching the picture on the package are slim indeed. Those that did survive took an extra year to bloom. My suggestion is to buy from an AIS sale or a local grower who has tested the variety in a climate similar to yours. An iris that grows well in Oregon or California may not flourish or even survive here. Irises are not big-ticket items for the mass merchandisers so they are not likely to customize their selections for regional climates. If you are lucky enough to live near a commercial grower, visit the garden when it is in bloom and see how many varieties are available these days. Which would you rather have, a choice of six varieties or six hundred varieties? When you buy locally, you get fresh rhizomes that have been out of the ground a few days, not months.



Lisa Story, tour organizer.

When you are jumping up and down and whooping about that first bloom on your latest variety next spring, your neighbors may wonder whether to call the funny farm. Unless, that is, you have given them some of your extra irises and they are running over to tell you about the irises that are blooming in their yard. Irises are not maintenance free even though they do allow for more neglect than any other flower of which I am aware. Eventually you will have to dig them up and divide them. This process goes a lot better if you have a partner to share the work and the rhizomes. My most enjoyable times spent in the garden have been those helping my friends who also grow irises. We now exchange irises each year and photograph the blooms with the hope that I will someday finish building an electronic catalog to our gardens. During the summer, my neighbors, Mike and Kay, often bring me meals in the evening so I can continue working in the garden until dark. Many people, who walk down my street, stop to come into the garden when the irises blooming in the spring. I always tell them that is what the garden is for and invite them to come around to the back yard where there are even more irises.

Lowell Baumunk Teaches Judge's Training

Lowell Baumunk's Iris Colorado garden was at peak bloom when he invited club members to attend his 2008 judge's training class. As you can see, eight members took the opportunity to learn the fine points of in-garden judging among Lowell's beautifully grown plants. And a walk through Barbara Lewis' stunning rock garden made the visit doubly rewarding.



2009 Region 20 Officers

Officers

Acting Regional Vice President – Stephen Blecher, sblecher@comcast.net – 303-798-9103, 1309 Ridge Rd., Littleton, CO 80120-3231
Treasurer – Suzanne McCarthy, hockeynutteh@comcast.net – 303-232-1653, 395 Balsam St., Lakewood, CO 80226
Secretary – Lisa Story, lisarastory@comcast.net – 303-233-8354
Past RVP – Betty Roberts, florabetty@aol.com – 719-282-9642

Directors

Terms Expiring in 2010

Dave Holm, spuds@bresnan.net – 719-852-2497
Position currently vacant
Patrice Van Vleet, clrimage@comcast.net – 303-979-0935

Terms Expiring in 2009

Dave Miller, DMillerIrisx@att.net – 303-277-0358
Bob Van Liere, iris4u2@comcast.net – 303-789-4747
Richard Nolde, webmaster, richard.nolde@cybox.com – 720-283-8752

Affiliate Directors

Elmohr – Jackie Goodwin, jackielvsroses@comcast.net – 719-460-1236
Loomis – Rose McClain, rmcclain001@centurytel.net – 719-254-3462

Newsletter Editor and Publisher

Glenn Guenterberg & Patrice Van Vleet, clrimage@comcast.net – 303-979-0935

Webmaster

Richard Nolde, richard.nolde@cybox.com – 720-283-8752

Region Committee Leads — *Phone numbers already listed in other area

Bylaws – Betty Roberts 719-282-9642	Membership – Lynda Love 303-757-1750
Display Board Content – Stephen Blecher*	Programs – Betty Roberts 719-282-9642
Door Prizes – Carol Eacker 719-633-5193	Publicity – Bob Van Liere 303-789-4747
Garden Tour – Lisa Story 303-233-8354	Research Liaison – Dave Miller*
Hand-outs/Display Board Lynda Love*	Sale – Stephen Blecher 303-798-9103
Historian – Catherine Gates 303-442-2353	Show – Betty Roberts 719-282-9642
Judges Trng. – Russ Eacker 719-633-5193	Sunshine – Carol Eacker*

Elmohr Iris Society Officers

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VP & Prog. Dir. – Susan Driver 719-591-7106	Parliamentarian – Elsie Funk 719-636-3895
Secretary – Marilyn Schwartz 303-755-4713	Sunshine – Carol Eacker 719-633-5193
Treasurer – Sally Funk 719-477-0435	Loomis Test Garden – Carol & Russ Eacker*
Mbrshp. – Sharon Raichelson 719-594-9275	*Phone numbers listed elsewhere on page

Loomis Iris Society Officers

President – Rose McClain 719-254-3462	Secretary – Karen Tomky 719-267-4012
VP – Lynne Apker 719-267-3663	Treas. – Paula Bennedsen 719-267-3245