

The background of the cover is a close-up photograph of several purple iris flowers. The petals are a vibrant purple, each with several dark blue or black veins radiating from the center. The centers of the flowers are bright orange, with white and yellow stamens visible. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting foliage.

The Review

The Group for
Beardless Irises

Issue No 14 Autumn 2017



Above *Crocus longiflorus* and below *Crocus nudiflorus* photos © Tony Goode



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Front Cover; *Crocus pulchellus*, photo ©Tony Goode

Back Cover; top 'Hello Yellow', (Bob Hollingworth, 1999) photo from Ensata Gardens. And below 'Haleakala', (Marky Smith 2004) photo from Aitkens Salmon Creek, 'Hello Yellow' is the pod parent of 'Haleakala'.

Inside the front cover is *Crocus longiflorus* above and below is *C. nudiflorus*.

Inside the back cover are a few of many seedlings that John Taylor has hybridised and planted in his garden.

Editor's Notes

Brita Carson

This has been an exciting year for Jennifer Hewitt for two reasons; the first is winning another Dykes Medal with her hybridised Siberian, '**Cloud Over Cleo**' and the other is winning the Hybridiser's award. Both awards are very prestigious and are only given to the best of the best - the very best iris and the very best hybridiser and this year both involved the same person. We all send Jennifer our many congratulations.

Jill Whitehead has written an article about Autumn flowering Crocus. The Crocus is a member of the family Iridaceae, which has a very large number of members some of which join the "family" and then later are removed only to be reinstated again. Jill has also written about Fred Raines and some Siberians he has hybridised. It is so good to have new hybridisers who like crossing beardless irises.

Hybridisers come from all over the world and John Taylor emailed me photos of his PCIs which look wonderful in his well established garden in Australia. Philip Jones likes working with the species and these seedlings will make some beautiful plants which should flower for him for the first time this year.

After hybridising I'm still "going on" about sequential bloom and repeaters. Please let me know if you have any and which ones they are? Jennifer has produced several Siberians with extended bloom - 'Madeleine Hamilton' and 'Peter Hewitt' are the most reliable but I've several others here that occasionally rebloom. I'm going to try splitting some and planting in a different position.

Alun Whitehead writes about another new member to the *Iris* family—*Iris x norrisii*. He is looking for any members, who like to experiment with seeds, to get the seed of the above that is available from the seed lists this year.

There is a New Kid that Chad Harris is warning us about that he has found in his own garden and may well be in yours. This pest has been noted in England but not so far registered in Scotland.

Last year was the best year for hybridisers but lets make 2018 even better. (Obviously stick to tweezers and don't use cotton buds and forget I ever mentioned them or I could be accused of polluting the sea. But you could buy the ones that are made of natural fibres which I haven't found yet.)

My special thanks to the following authors, photographers and proof readers; Terry Aitken, Anne Blanco White, Julia Carson, Tony Goode, Chad Harris, Brian Hersey, Jennifer Hewitt, Marina Jackson, Sally McKenzie, Fred Raines,



‘Cloud Over Clee’ ©Alun Whitehead

Letter from the Chair

Anne Blanco White

This has been one of our weirder years - in London at least. Naturally my plants flowered at any time they chose and usually just before or just after show dates. You never can win there and I have an *I. formosana* now. On the whole though they flowered adequately and even set seed which was odd since there seemed to be a serious dearth of bees, hover flies and moths by night. There were all too many dear little moths – pale fawn and about 3mm in length – with a preference for indoors. Surprisingly few ants, but unnecessary quantities of ‘men of war’ under all the pots. Then there were very hot dry spells which didn’t help anything. At least ravaging caterpillars didn’t consume the interiors of my seed pods, but unusually earwigs did wreck several spuria seed sets.

It was a bad year for alpine strawberries which is a fruit I like and which usually does well, but at the same time a rampant form of a wild viola has taken off and cluttered up the flower beds. It will have to be evicted totally which will take about five years. But some of you will remember my complaints about iron poisoning of my plants. Oddly enough the manganese

sulphate seems to have worked pretty well on most of the irises at least with the odd result that there are apparently irises of which I had no knowledge growing happily in places where no iris was planted and without any trace of a label. All I can do is feed them up in the hope that they will flower and be identified. Actually the final horror is a fig seedling! It can't stay there and will have to be put in a pot as soon as I can manage it.

Naturally, since the garden is on a N-S alignment and the sun comes over the building at noon by its calculations, it can get very hot indeed. So most of my water irises are grown in pots which stand in water trays of varying depths. Now my next door neighbour decided she wanted a mini-pond in her garden and wanted it furnished with frogs. This was about the time when the frog population generally was in decline because of some infestation, but it was possible to buy guaranteed clean frog spawn and she bought some. It undoubtedly germinated and later in the year I found diddly little frogs wandering around my garden. We never have discovered just where they get through, but I don't mind them. This year I found one swimming around a water tray too deep for it to climb out from. So I dumped a spray of some plant to help it and went away to think. Then I remembered the toads in a previous garden: the water trays were washing up bowls and the solution was quite long duckboards and no dead toads.

So, as you know, the BIS is moving forward under John Milner's guidance and it is important that we replot or replant so that we can provide really good displays for all our shows next year. And that we give serious consideration to our hybridising so that new beardless iris plants can be displayed and sold.

Do something serious too with your new mobile phones with cameras so that there are new pictures of new irises for the websites. You can't expect poor Sophie Leathart to produce good reproductions of irises without good photos.

Ian Menage needs all your best photos to build up a good library of iris photos and other interesting ones connected with irises. Please include as much information that you know to be correct. These are better to be your own photos otherwise permission to use them must be sought from the photographer. Please email them to ian.menage@gmail.com and please email me with any new registrations if you wish to see them in the Review.

2017 Registrations

BLENCATHRA (Fred Raines) Sdlg. 2014. SIB (dip.), 30in (76cm), E-M. S. and style arms pinkish lilac; F. medium purple-red (RHS 70A); signal fine gold veins. (a) 2, (b) 3, (c) 2in (5cm) x 3in (7.5cm). Ruffled. Fragrance absent. Dunlop sdlg. 09068-05156-50 x 'Painted Woman'.



HAMSTONE (Brian Hersey) Sdlg. BH235-07-10. SIB (dip.), 24in (61cm), M. S. light yellow with faint purple veining; style arms light greyish-purple with light yellow midrib and tips; F. dark yellow with maroon veining, end third of veining blending together into light grey-purple, with dark yellow edging. (a) 3, (b) 4, (c) 2in (5cm) x 4in (10cm). Fragrance absent. 'Here Be Dragons' x 'Rosselline'.



KATIE BEAR (Fred Raines) Sdlg. 217. SIB (dip.), 36in (91cm), E-M. S. greyed-white (RHS 156A); style arms white, flushed light violet; F. greyed-white (156A) with pink tinge, blueish cast morning and evening, signals yellow. (a) 2, (b) 3-5, (c) 2.5in (6.5cm) x 3in (7.5cm). Fragrance absent. 'Salamander Crossing' x unknown.



SARAH LITTLEFIELD (Fred Raines) Sdlg. 2008. SIB (tet.), 30in (76cm), M. S. and style arms dark blue-violet; F. upper half yellow to cream, gradually becoming overlaid dark blue-violet to almost solid colour in lower blade, with hairline white edge. (a) 2, (b) 3, (c) 2.5in (6.5cm) x 3.5in (9cm). Fragrance absent. 'Peter Hewitt' x unknown.



Fred Raines, ‘Canary Girls’ and his new Siberians Jill Whitehead



Photograph ©Alun Whitehead

Fred Raines with the cup for the Souvenir de M. Lémon Trophy for ‘Canary Girls’.

This year Fred has registered three Siberian irises which is a bit of a break with tradition for him. Up to now his registrations have been bearded iris; the first being in 2010 and range from TBs to SDBs but my favourite must be ‘Cream Soda Pop’, not because of the form or colour but just because I love the name! It does however show my age and Fred’s, because I don’t think Cream Soda or pop would be used by the younger generation.

His Siberians are ‘Blencathra’, ‘Katie Bear’ and ‘Sarah Littlefield’.

‘Blencathra’ is named after one of the most northerly hills in the Lake District which is also known as Saddleback. It was featured on a television programme and Fred was inspired by the scenery. It is the result of a Jeff Dunlop seedling crossed with ‘Painted Woman’. Described as having pinkish lilac standards and medium purple-red falls. The signal has fine gold veins. No fragrance and slightly ruffled.

‘Katie Bear’ has white style arms which are flushed violet, standards and falls are grey-white with a pink tinge. One of it’s parents is ‘Salamander Crossing’ which is a Marty Schafer and Jan Sacks seedling from 1999. Named in honour of his faithful cat, who he still misses, and who gave him so much joy and was such good company for over sixteen years.

‘Sarah Littlefield’ is a seedling from a ‘Peter Hewitt’ cross and has standards

of a dark violet blue, with falls which are yellowy cream gradually becoming overlaid with dark blue-violet. Fred named it in honour of his neighbour who enjoys seeing his irises from her windows and particularly admired this one. She was very chuffed to have it named for her.



‘Canary Girls’

Fred has always worked with plants in one way or another and he is a Gloucestershire man through and through. Those of you who are BIS members will know that Fred won the Souvenir de M. Lémon Trophy for ‘Canary Girls’ this year. A first BIS award for Fred. It is awarded annually to the most outstanding cultivar in the Award of Garden Commendation (AGC) Trial that is of a sufficiently high standard and which then allows entry into the Dykes Trial. Now we hope that Fred is going to enter his Siberians into the BIS Trials, so that he can enjoy some further success with them. Fred is an active

member of the West & Midlands Iris Group, joining in our visits and exhibiting at the shows often winning Best in Show. He somehow manages to bring a vast number of irises in flower to the shows when the rest of us are struggling to get one or two good blooms. He certainly contributes a great deal to the overall success of the shows and is very happy to share his knowledge and enthusiasm. One might think he is growing on really good soil but he assures me this is not so. He grows in three different sites having about 3 acres in total. I asked Fred why he has started breeding and growing Siberians and he gave me several reasons. Firstly to increase his knowledge of the Iridaceae. He already raises gladioli from seed and grows PCIs but also because he has a life-long interest in bees and he is concerned about their problems, as we all should be, that bees have been experiencing lately. By broadening the range of irises he grows, he has increased the number of bees visiting his garden. In his experience bees prefer Siberians to the bearded iris, with last year being a bumper year for visiting bees.

Fred is a patient chap who enjoys his plants and especially raising them from seed. He is not one to boast, a true gentleman in that old-fashioned way, always polite, always caring and with a twinkle in his eye for the irises and the ladies!

Hybridising Siberians: some possible answers

Jennifer Hewitt

We have to accept that some irises are enthusiastic, or at least co-operative, parents and others aren't. There is probably no way to tell whether the ovaries are infertile or have low fertility but if pollens are readily accepted by other cultivars but fail more than once on one it most likely just won't set seed. Could there be a physical impediment such as a blockage or gap so that pollens can't grow down to the ovary?

An iris may have very little or poor pollen. Narrow, pointed, arrow-shaped anthers can produce very little pollen – 'White Swirl' comes to mind. I've seen them elsewhere but luckily not often. Marjorie Brummitt got pollen from 'White Swirl' to produce the Siberian Dykes Medal winner 'Anniversary' but said she had to get at it very early and it had only a few grains. I can't remember others but have an idea that her 'Limeheart' (which had 'White Swirl' as its pod parent) may be one. To suggest others would mean going back over many years' records.

Another reason which I think was quoted in my younger days but I don't recall having read recently was incompatibility. If a particular cross fails repeatedly this may be the case. An iris will accept other pollens or set bee pods, but not the one we especially want it to – though the reverse cross may take. It needs someone with more knowledge than I have about the whole pollination business to give possible explanations – do the pollen grains and ovaries have to 'fit' together? I don't recall reading about research though feel sure it must have been done; I have a faint recollection of a YB article by Dr. Jack Ellis in a YB – 1970s? – with photos of pollen grains. Most hybridisers have experienced probable incompatibility and my records include some repeatedly unsuccessful attempts. I haven't kept weather records except for brief general notes in diaries but doubt if weather conditions are a factor as other crosses made the same day have taken. It could be that line breeding among a limited range of plants brings problems as inbreeding is well known to lead to defects and limited fertility, but only Brita knows if this was likely in her attempts.

She will also know whether some failures are due to trying to cross diploids and tetraploids in efforts to produce triploids. Not a few people have done this, including Currier McEwen, but without success. Seeds do result and so do seedlings but they are always dip or tet; those I have known of have been diploid and I think of limited fertility at best. No bee pods appeared on plants I grew that I remember. Nora Scopes's 'Troika' came from 'Floating Island' (D) x 'Silver Edge' (T). Has anyone had seed from it or seen it listed in the BIS seed distribution?

Apomixis can happen but as seed would be produced it might not be suspected, though if all the resulting offspring closely resembled the pod parent there could be suspicions. This is when receiving pollen from another cultivar stimulates the ovary to produce seed but cross-fertilisation hasn't actually happened. This could possibly be what has occurred when a pod

seems to start to swell but then shrinks and dies.

Two things in Brita's account I do wonder about. Like her I collect pollen in little pots which are kept indoors until needed, but I always keep them in a warm, usually sunny room but never on a windowsill or where they can get hot. I have a conservatory now but would never keep the pots of pollen even in a shaded part. Days when the sun comes and goes could overheat the pollen in quite a short time.

Secondly I do wonder about the milk containers and whether moisture rising from the soil, or transpired from the plant, could, when the sun is out, lead to condensation and a moister atmosphere inside the container than is ideal? Not having tried to use anything like that I'm prepared to be shot down. Trying to protect flowers when rain is likely is a problem and sometimes I made a sort of umbrella with wires wrapped round the canes and long ends arching down, all covered with polythene bags but the 'umbrella' not extending much below the flower to allow as much air as possible to circulate – the lower end was spread as widely as the bag allowed, though it might be rolled down when rain was falling. But as far as I remember not one such arrangement, even when I was running in and out between showers, ever gave any successes.

Going back to reluctant parenthood, there was a red seedling of Tomas Tamberg's with lovely colour and good form plus vigour and good increase which was never registered; probably because it had only two flowers per stem. I tried to use it as both pod and pollen parent on several occasions with different partners, hoping to improve my red tets. It had nice plump anthers with plenty of pollen that looked normal and just in case I'd misinterpreted the seedling number it was tried with a diploid at least once. Every attempt failed. Sometimes we just have to accept that for no reason we can see, an iris just will not set seed – even, as far as I can recall, with the help of bees. Then 'Stephen Wilcox' appeared from a totally unexpected direction and proved a willing parent either way, though for various reasons including moving house I've not actually had any seedlings from it yet.

As regards opening the flower I've always tried to do it as soon as the falls have relaxed enough to be removed easily, and remove the standards and anthers too as this was Marjorie Brummitt's method. Bees do indeed cling to the fragments of falls to get nectar but are never near enough to the stigmatic lip. Then I apply the pollen as soon as possible, not waiting for the lip to bend forward and be obviously sticky unless the desired pollen isn't already available; it doesn't seem to make any difference. I watched Currier in his garden removing anthers and tying the falls back up but was too clumsy to do it myself, I just ruined the flowers. Marty described putting pollen on while the lip is still tightly pressed to the underside of the style arm and he's very successful so there doesn't seem to be any rule other than take account of the weather! If using tweezers as Currier did and Marty and I do, it means you can access closed stigmas more easily than with a cotton bud, I imagine, but a bud or small paintbrush would be good for gathering loose pollen that's in the bottom of the jar. I too can't be bothered with cleaning a brush but though it's

possible to gather loose pollen on the tips of tweezers, if the brush is only being used once that day it is more effective. I should probably be dutiful about cleaning tweezers after each use but I'm afraid they just get wiped on whatever's handy, often my shirt, then are closely inspected to make sure no pollen is still adhering. One thing to be careful about with tweezers is to hold the anther itself as the filament is fragile and easily bent or broken. How do you remove the anthers – cotton buds don't work I think? Tweezers can be used for taking off everything you do or don't want without damaging the style but however you do it, be gentle.

Although Currier's was, quite literally, a seaside garden it was further south than Britain, and so is Marty and Jan's, and having been to both at flowering time I'd guess they are warmer than ours usually are. Is climate change going to make a difference? To me it almost seems as if our seasons have shifted with spring and summer arriving earlier and now (August) it's more like September, but it could easily change again and prove me wrong. After so many years in a cooler garden than most in the southern half of England, probably quite similar to south-western Scotland, I'm interested to see what differences there are in a warmer and dryer area, and in a town too though near to open country. Humidity does seem higher, perhaps due to the surroundings, and could be another factor in success or lack of it. In the wider context differences may be small but microclimates matter.

Only once did I try freezing pollen and it was a complete failure. When the packet was opened the thawing pollen was very moist. If I'd been interested enough to try again, probably with more careful packaging (and had known of silica gel), it might have worked better, who knows? I was, and still am, keen to have more repeat bloom, but had so little on cultivars that performed elsewhere that there wasn't the impetus to pursue it, though obviously it could be very useful. How long, I wonder, does pollen stay viable if it is just kept dry but not dried out? Getting the conditions just right would be very tricky for any length of time but a few weeks between first and repeat bloom might be all right.

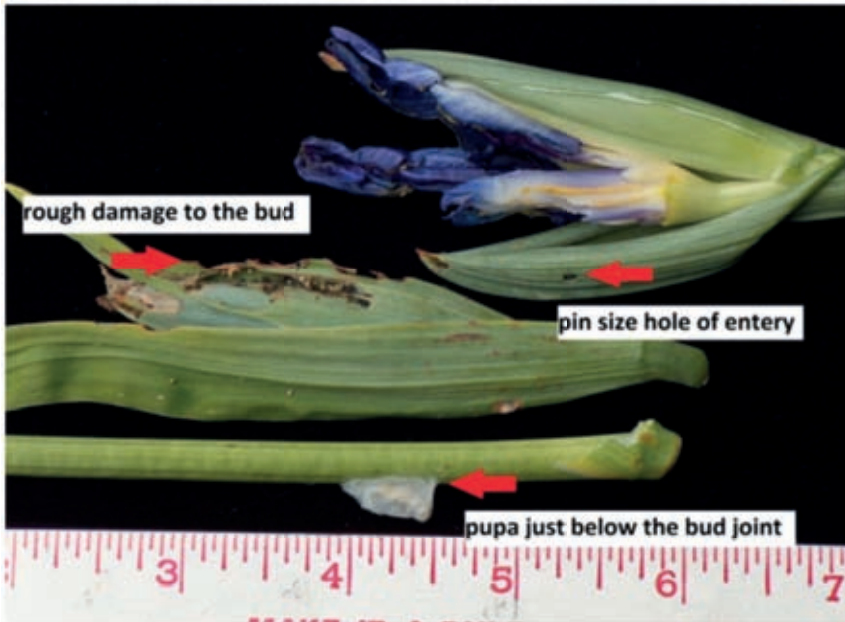
Although there are snags, hybridising is successful and rewarding. Whether one starts with making crosses or growing seeds from GBI or BIS (and how generous it is to make hand-pollinated crosses and send the seed for us to grow), there is nothing quite like the excitement of seeing the first flowers open. I'd love to see more beardless seedlings not only being grown but entered for the BIS Trials and the chances of getting something worthwhile are really quite good. Of course one must be selective and may have to try more than once but results do show that there are no rules as to what may be acceptable. If the plant is healthy and vigorous and blooms freely, the forms and colours of flowers can vary considerably. Do have a go!

The New Kid

Chad Harris

Chad Harris is a SIGNA member who gardens in Washougal Washington. There he hybridises *Iris ensata*, *Iris laevigata* and other irises. His Mt. Pleasant Iris Farm is a National display garden of Japanese Iris.

We have a new kid to watch for in the iris beds. Its proper name is *Cnephasia longana*, and its common name is the strawberry fruit worm. It is a very small, daytime-flying moth that has hitched a ride from its native Western Europe. First recorded here in the Pacific Northwest in the 1940s attacking strawberry fields, it is now found from south British Columbia to northern California. Host plants list for this invasive moth is very extensive including *Asteraceae*: aster, *Convolvulaceae*: bindweed, *Fabaceae*: legume, pea and bean, *Geraniaceae*: geranium, *Papaveraceae*: poppy, *Polygonaceae*: knotweed, *Rosaceae*: Cotoneaster, *Rubus* (blackberries), *Prunus* (plums, cherries, peaches, apricots and almonds) and many others including *Iris*.





I find the life cycle of this invasive moth to be very interesting. The adults lay eggs in the cracks and crevices of rough surfaces, such as the bark of a tree, in early summer. Upon hatching, the caterpillar looks for a tight protective location, spins a web for cover and hibernates through the summer, fall and winter. Upon waking the next spring, the caterpillar sends out silken threads to the wind and rides the current with this parachute to a host plant. There it spins a silken covering and mines the leaf, seeking out its final goal, which, on a strawberry, is the developing fruit. On irises it follows the natural folds of the leaf, climbing the flower stem as it elongates from the fan. Once at the base of the bud, it burrows in and starts to feed on the developing bud. The caterpillar then pupates on the stem of the iris. In a week it morphs into a small, fast-flying quarter-inch moth, mates and lays eggs, and a new, once-a-year cycle begins again.

I first noticed bud damage in 2010, the year before hosting the National Japanese Iris Convention, on an *Iris ensata* (Japanese Iris) field. The damage was easy to spot visually, and it was especially easy to feel by running a hand up the stem to find the buds to be rough instead of smooth. Upon opening the bud and finding a caterpillar, I was perplexed because I spray the fields for thrips with the systemic insecticide Merit. I have since learned that Merit

is not good for control of caterpillars. I called the State Agriculture Department and scheduled an inspection, where we collected live samples of the caterpillars and pupa (see photos). These were sent to the State and identified as *Cnephasia longana*. Later that spring I collected five 5-gallon buckets of infested *Iris ensata* buds. These I bagged and destroyed by placing them in the garbage. The next spring at the Convention, I again handpicked affected buds off the plants. However, some of them got past me and were a topic of discussion in the field. Many people from the eastern United States said, "Looks like iris borer." I assured them that it was not, that the caterpillar did not travel down the stem to the rhizome but ate the forming flower inside the bud and then pupated just under the bud on the stem.

The following years, with the American Iris National Convention plants in place, I found some damaged buds in the very late tall bearded irises. Again, I handpicked all of the damaged buds and destroyed the single caterpillar by crushing. I have not seen any damage in any of the other iris fields. I deduced that the time to start looking for the very small juvenile caterpillars was before they burrow into the buds in mid-May or early June. This past year (2015), upon finding the first caterpillars with their silken cover in the folds of the leaves, I over-sprayed the field with Malathion, and followed up with a second spraying five days later. As a result, instead of several buckets of destroyed buds, I found only a half dozen *Iris ensata* blooms that needed to be handpicked. I believe that contact spraying with Malathion before caterpillars find cover inside the buds is the answer to controlling this new kid on the block.

Chad Harris has kindly given me permission to reprint his article from the SIGNA 95 Bulletin on this nasty little horror which is known to be prevalent in many parts of Western Europe. That must mean it could easily be found in our gardens. Has it already been found here, and if yes, please let me know any "where and when" so that I can pass on this information. It is actually listed as a UK moth so beware.

Sissinghurst is a garden to visit in May for iris enthusiasts. Wonderful old varieties not only of bearded irises but also beardless. Well worth a visit.



‘Placid Waters’ (above) and the irises at the end of the Moat (below) Photographs ©Sally McKenzie



Autumn Flowering Crocus

Jill Whitehead

Love them or hate them, seems to be the feeling about autumn flowering crocus. Some people see them as a delight, as a bonus to cheer up autumn, others think crocus should only flower in spring. Snowdrops suffer the same fate, but the real galanthophiles will snap them up to add to their collection. The autumn crocus is easily confused with *Colchicum* also incorrectly known as an “Autumn Crocus”. *Colchicums* are members of the Colchicaceae and have six stamens rather than the three that crocus have. *Colchicums* flower before their large, coarse, leaves emerge while some autumn flowering crocus also flower before their leaves emerge but not all and generally their leaves are the typical narrow foliage of the genus.

Several species of crocus flower in autumn, and in fact Brian Mathew lists twenty-two non-yellow species in his book, *The Smaller Bulbs*, but I will concentrate on some of those which make good garden plants, not requiring a bulb frame and are usually available. I will leave the botanical aspects to the crocus experts, or “croconuts” as they are often referred to. *Crocus speciosus* is probably the best known, native to Greece, northern Turkey and Iran, growing in woods and open hillsides. They are easy to cultivate, requiring little maintenance and fairly tolerant of most conditions, except excessive wet in summer. They can look delightful when allowed to naturalise either in grass or among deciduous shrubs. The leaves appear in late winter but beware it will spread both by seed and numerous small cormlets which form around the base of the parent bulb, so do not plant it among your tiny treasures. It needs space and some degree of freedom to look at its best. To quote E.A. Bowles, “They then provide carpets and mimic pools of blue in September as rich as those of bluebells in May”. They are available in a number of named colour forms, including ‘Oxonian’, a darker form said to have been selected by Dykes and introduced by Barr and Sons in 1945. It has large flowers of deep violet blue, but not Oxford blue, with deep orange stigma. *Crocus speciosus* ‘Conqueror’, deep sky blue, aptly named as it is a vigorous grower. *C. s.* ‘Albus’ has an AGM, and at Beth Chatto’s garden in Essex, it looks delightful growing through *Euphorbia myrsinites* or through mats of thyme with its bowl-shaped flowers standing proud. *C. s.* ‘Aitchisonii’ has probably the largest flower of pale lavender mauve.

I wonder how true to name the bulbs would be if I purchased some tomorrow? From what I have read it seems that there is a certain amount of confusion. Janis Ruksans writes quite often on this topic, as do others in the Scottish Rock Garden Forum. I have yet to see a copy of Janis Ruksans latest publication *The World of Crocuses* but look forward to reading it soon.

Another autumn species is *Crocus pulchellus* which is closely related to *C. speciosus* and will readily hybridise with it. The flower shape of *C. pulchellus* differs in being more goblet-shaped with white anthers making it easy to spot the difference from *C. speciosus* with its yellow anthers. However it is just as easy to grow but considered to be less vigorous. It was first described in *Curtis Botanical Magazine* in 1841.

Crocus nudiflorus comes from the meadow lands of S.W. France and E. Spain and similar type conditions would be best for growing it. It looks a splendid sight growing at RHS Wisley in the Alpine meadow, the deep purple flowers really glowing when the sun shines. The long-tubed flowers appear well before the leaves and hence its very appropriate name. One slightly unusual characteristic of the species is to spread by underground stolons and so prefers to be left undisturbed. It also spreads by seed which makes it ideal for



Corm with underground stolon ©Tony Goode

a grassy/meadow type situation. It is said to be naturalised in some parts of Britain, but there are no native species of crocus so it probably occurred as an escapee from Monasteries, where monks grew it as a substitute for saffron (*Crocus sativus*) which was very highly prized. The BRC (Biological Records Centre) website gives a distribution map and there is a cluster of sites in North East England. One area where it grew was around Nottingham and is in fact the county flower of Nottinghamshire. In 2002 *Plantlife* ran a “County Flower” campaign where people voted for the flower that best represented their county. Tens of thousands of people responded and “The Naked Crocus” (*C. nudiflorus*) was chosen for Nottinghamshire. Perhaps “Crocus Street” in Nottingham is a bit of a giveaway! They used to grow in profusion along the Trent-side meadows and around the castle. The *Gardeners Chronicle* 1872 talked about hundreds of people gathering them to decorate their living rooms. Disappearing under concrete they aren’t seen nowadays, but recently there has been renewed interest in conserving and further extending plantings of this flower.

Funny how it is often men of the cloth who ‘found’ plants in past times e.g. the Rev. Gilbert White, Rev. Wilks, Rev. Wooley Dod, etc. Did they have more time than others to look or did they have more knowledge than others? In the *Flora Notinghamiensis*, 1807, it states that the Rev. J. T. Becher was the first to discover that this was a distinct species. Previously it had been incorrectly identified by botanist Charles Deering in his publication *A Catalogue of*

Plants growing around Nottingham, 1738 as Colchicum commune but his description was interesting: "Meadow saffron. Flowers in November, whence gardeners call them Naked Boys." The Rev. Becher corrected this and supplied the following information:

"*Crocus nudiflorus* grows in the greatest profusion between Nottingham Castle and the river Trent, in meadows whose soil is naturally sandy. There this plant enamels some acres of ground every autumn, and has been mistaken by strangers for a piece of water. From its place of growth, time of flowering, and the information of old inhabitants of the neighbourhood, there can be no doubt of it being what Deering mistook for the colchicum, which does not grow thereabouts. It flowers in perfection early in October, and fades before the end of the month".

The Rev. Becher must have achieved some fame for this and it was his specimen which formed the basis of James Sowerby's illustration in Sir J.E. Smith's *English Botany* (1790-1813 Vol 7).

It also received some fame in 1917 when a poem was anonymously published in *The Times Literary Section*, entitled "From a Trench" which contained the following:

That there are crocuses at Nottingham!

Wild crocuses at Nottingham!

Blue crocuses at Nottingham!

Though here the grass is red.

But here we trample down the grass

Into a purple slime;

There lives no tree to give the birds

House room in pairing-time.

We live in holes like cellar rats,

But through the noise and smell

I often see the crocuses

Of which the people tell.

Why! There are crocuses at Nottingham!

Bright crocuses at Nottingham!

Real crocuses at Nottingham

Because we're here in Hell.

It was at first thought this poem was written by a soldier in the trenches but it was found to be written by a woman, which must have caused quite a stir at the time! Maud Anna Bell, who was helping with a Relief fund charity and had never seen a battlefield but showed that flowers at home were important to the men at war. Areas where it grew and in some cases still grows are often associated with being close to places with St. John in the name, or showing some connection to the Knights of St. John, the Knights Hospitallers.

Another species *Crocus banaticus* (syn. *C. iridiflorus* or *C. byzantinus*) is a distinct species which is leafless at flowering time. Patrick Synge in his book *Bulbs* rates this highly, as does Brian Mathew. According to both, it is easy to grow if given a moist, leaf-rich soil and spreads easily by off-sets and seed. I

have not tried it – yet! Easily distinguishable from other species because the inner segments of the flower are shorter than the outer ones, which suggests that it might look more like a small bulbous iris. Bowles also describes it as quite charming, an elegant flower of a deep lilac-blue with no yellow colouring in the throat. Several named forms were raised by James Allen (1832-1906), an amateur gardener and plantsman from Shepton Mallet, who is better known as a breeder of snowdrops. *Galanthus* ‘Magnet’ and *G.* ‘Merlin’ being two of his most popular ones. His crocus varieties were ‘Rosamund’, ‘President’ and ‘Ruby’ but I don’t believe that they are still commercially available.

Bowles certainly extolls the virtues of *Crocus longiflorus*, although he wishes it was still called *C. odorus* which as he points out is more fitting as it does not have the longest flowers but is certainly highly scented. I particularly like his description from *My Garden in Autumn and Winter* “I hope that all who read this will plant a patch or two of this cheap, reliable, and lovely plant, if only for giving their noses a treat.” Other sources also note its reliability, it is fairly readily available and has pale to deep lilac flowers with flaming orange-red styles and flowers with its leaves.

To continue with Bowles’ garden thoughts, he queries why gardeners think autumn flowering crocus are hard to grow: “I cannot believe, however, that there is a garden in England that can produce a healthy cabbage and a marigold in which *Crocus speciosus* and *C. kotschyanus* (previously *C. zonatus*) would not become so thoroughly at home after a few years that it would be as hard to entirely eradicate them as it is to banish ground-elder”. Not sure I totally agree that they are completely trouble free. Once established is vastly different from getting them so. My problem, and I know others who share it, is that voles also like them. I have tried the usual remedy of soaking in something unpleasant before planting but without success. Beth Chatto experienced a similar problem and used jars with poison, with very small holes cut out of the lid, but I am loath to do this. Christine Skelmersdale during a recent talk gave the advice of growing the crocus in pots, then planting out into the garden as the leaves are going over. Will this work I ask myself? I am going to try it. It has also been suggested to plant the bulbs and then cover with wood ash as voles don’t like this. Of course, squirrels are also another hazard who like to bury nuts in any freshly dug soil or a handy pot – they are not fussy but are lazy, so apparently, I need to firm the soil really well after planting to encourage them to dig elsewhere! Bowles also gives us the advice that most people fail with these crocuses because they plant them too late, suggesting July and August being the optimum time. This thought was also echoed by Roy Genders in his publication *Bulbs all Year*; plant in May or early June is his advice.

As to planting combinations, some like the effect of the crocus growing through a low ground cover plant, others think it messy. Beth Chatto obviously likes the effect. All a matter of taste, but Bowles suggests *Acaena*, saxifrage or low growing geraniums would look effective when in flower but perhaps the leaves might become a nuisance? He prefers *Crocus speciosus* growing through ivy and I can see that working well. Roy Genders plants his

under a row of tall beech trees planting in sections with spring flowering ones at the front, followed by autumn flowerers and finally *Colchicum* at the back – giving a very long season of interest from August through to May, cutting the grass in late June and then giving a feed. Sounds a brilliant picture but not all of us have that space. He also goes on to suggest that *C. speciosus* will “prove most accommodating when planted between crazy-paving stones” which rather shows the age of the publication (1954). But certainly, Christopher Lloyd was equally fond of autumn crocus and concurred with Bowles and Genders on planting time and as he says “the trouble is that bulb catalogues steal up on us in the languid days of mid-summer, when planting is at its lowest ebb” and I couldn’t agree more! It seems that autumn crocus are used two ways at Great Dixter, either using *C. speciosus* through the meadow area or using *C. longiflorus* with *C. ochroleucus* under a bay tree with *Cyclamen hederifolium* as a bed-fellow.

The other autumn flowering crocus that I admired greatly was in the Alpine House at Wisley. There are always so many little gems to see there but in this instance it was *Crocus mathewii*. This was only found growing in Turkey in 1994 and is named in honour of Brian Mathew whose crocus knowledge is renowned worldwide. I just loved the deep purple colour of the throat combined with the red stigma and yellow anthers. Apparently it grows well outside given well drained soil.



Autumn colours with crocus ©RHS/Joanna Kossak.

There are other species which are commercially available, such as *Crocus*

niveus with its large white flowers or *C. medius*, a late autumn or early winter flowerer which would certainly help to extend the flowering season. This has purple flowers but sometimes poorer forms have paler flowers, the stigma are finely branched, orange or reddish in colour. At the opposite end of the season there is *C. kotschyanus* which often flowers at the end of August/beginning of September, distinctive for its golden or orange spots at the base of each petal. Again listed as one of the easiest to grow.

Autumn flowering crocus are often neglected in favour of their spring cousins but I feel they have a place in our gardens. Although talking about autumn bulbs in general, Christopher Lloyd in *The Well-Tempered Garden* sums it up, "they deserve a special place in our affection because their pristine qualities are in such striking contrast to the scene of decay that otherwise surrounds us. Autumn has its own charm, but these bulbs do help, emotionally at least, to bridge the chasm separating autumn from spring". Very special thanks to Tony Goode for all his help and his photographs.



Crocus banaticus ©Tony Goode



Crocus nudiflorus ©Tony Goode



Crocus longiflorus
©Tony Goode

Reliving the past? - *Iris x norrisii*

(syn. *Pardancanda x norrisii*)

Alun Whitehead

In 2007 we had a run of luck. You often hear people in the iris world say that you can have irises in flower every day of the year. We had this in our mind when we started the year and kept a record of which irises were in flower on a daily basis. Amazingly, we had at least one iris in flower from January 1st until August 14th when our luck ran out. To be honest, they weren't always show standard, but they were open. In the early part of the year, *I. unguicularis* went for a second flowering otherwise there would have been a big early gap.

Taxonomists to the rescue? Our run of luck might have continued if we were still growing *Pardancanda x norrisii* because it is now reclassified as genus *Iris*. We grew it some years earlier and there are

poor photos of it flowering in the garden on August 17th 2001. As you will see there are plenty of buds to come and so it would have extended our run considerably. The colour range we achieved included a good purple with a sheen to the petals, but this didn't make it to the garden, dying soon after flowering. The yellows and reds proved better growers and they were later potted up and sold, but they couldn't have been a good seller or we would have continued with them.



Looking at the current *RHS Plant Finder* I see there are only three suppliers: RHS Harlow Carr, RHS Rosemoor and RHS Wisley. The odd cultivar has been listed there ('Heart of Darkness' 2013, 'Dazzler'¹ 2014, and 'Butterfly Magic' 2016), but apparently briefly. So why take an interest in something so unpopular?

It is not just the wish to extend our iris season. There is also the rapidity to flower. There are reports of raising them early under cover producing flowers the same year. The most rapid iris from seed to flower here was a PCI which achieved it in 13 months. So, this should be even faster. The range of colours and patterns is also attractive. If you look on the American Iris Society's wiki page, you will find several cultivars by Darrell Probst in the States, now being sold by Joe Pye Weed². There are also some recent cvs from Yike Gao in China. The search shows that there are a myriad of patterns and colourings possible. For me I think the seed route is more promising.

Firstly, I would like to regain a form similar to the purple I lost but preferably

on a better plant. To achieve this, I recently purchased some commercial seed from the original source (there was more than I needed and the spare is in the seed exchange). From gleanings on the web, the plants can be short lived by nature and so a self-sowing bed sounds an interesting way forward. Any form I dislike can be rogued and the variety could be mouth-watering. If you join me on this adventure, what can you expect? *Iris x norrisii* was a cross made by Samuel N. Norris in 1970 with *I. dichotoma* as pod parent and *Belamcanda* (now *Iris domestica*) as pollen parent. Both species are unique in having their chromosome count the same, ($2n=32$), and being the same the cross should be replicable without too much difficulty. However, I noted that Sam Norris spent 10 years on it, whilst Darrell Probst gained easier success with a later imported form of *I. dichotoma* and so some plants may be better at crossing than others. I would expect the hybrids will exhibit a range of characteristics between the two parent types. Possible results.

	<i>I. dichotoma</i>	<i>I. domestica</i>
Flowering	late afternoon/evening	morning
Stem height	40-100cm	50-100cm
Flowers	Standards & falls	Almost equal tepals
Flower diameter	c. 4cm	c. 5cm
Leaf height	c. 30cm	c. 30-60cm
Origin	China, Japan, Siberia, Mongolia	C. Asia, India, China, Japan
Habitat ³	Scrub & grassy places	Sandy meadows, moist scrubland & shady places

Iris dichotoma

The ‘Vesper Iris’ is known for opening its flowers in the afternoon and closing them by morning, named after Vespers – the dusk service. Luckily the plants don’t take that literally and their flowers can be enjoyed on the long summer evenings. By nature the plants are short-lived and so to survive they have evolved to be capable of producing many flowers and even more seed, matching the floriferousness of other biennials or short-lived perennials. There are typically 6 flowers in a cluster and because the stems are dichotomous (multi-branching), there can be 10 flower clusters on the plant. Hence they produce plenty of small dainty flowers in July-August in the UK.



Iris dichotoma and *I. domestica* share several things in common. Their flowers twist as they go over and if not fertilised they drop – self dead-heading. Both species had smaller allied species. For *I. dichotoma*, this was *I. subdichotoma*, but I find it unclear whether this was a true species or just a local form.

Iris domestica

The ‘Blackberry Lily’ is named after the shiny black seeds revealed when the pods split. Before its change to iris, two species are mentioned, *Belamcanda chinensis* and *B. flabellata*. The difference is easier to spot visually than read in a description.



B. chinensis is distichous (with opposite alternate leaves up the stem) and is taller than *B. flabellata* which has the same leaf formation as *B. chinensis*, but in this case the leaf bases are clustered at the base of the stem, giving a more ‘iris-like’ fan. As *B. flabellata* was found within the range of the other, it was thought that it might be a local form. Certainly, since its migration to genus *Iris*, there seems to be no mention of *I. domestica flabellata* even though there are forms with this shape.

Another confusing point is when was it introduced? Graham Stuart Thomas, the famous National Trust advisor, noted 1823 and that it gives a long late flowering season against a wall in well drained soil. Writing in 1892, Baker mentions that it has been in cultivation for two centuries³. Certainly it must have been around a long time for it has naturalised itself in Malaysia and parts of N. America. While it can self-sow I doubt this will prove a problem.

One aspect worth noting for our ‘dash to flower’, is that cold treatment has been effective on getting a more consistent germination in *I. domestica*. Deno⁴ notes that keeping the seed at c. 4°C for 4 weeks and then raising the temperature to c. 20°C gave 76% germination in a week. If any of the *Iris x norrisii* inherit this tendency, a short cold treatment (kept in the fridge with moist compost/vermiculite – but not wet) may be useful. Keeping them in the cold longer was detrimental.

I was interested in Brian Mathew’s note⁵ that *I. domestica* doesn’t like it too hot and dry. Several plants have suffered in pots in a hot polytunnel and I will try them in a shady one where *I. japonica* thrives. Perhaps a similar spot under trees where *I. japonica* romps may also suit it.

¹ ‘Dazzler’ is a seed strain.

² The article by Jan Sacks in the *AIS Bulletin* October 2009 is essential reading.

³ *Handbook of the Iridaceae*, by J. G. Baker 1892. He was Keeper of the Herbarium at The Royal Gardens, Kew. Finding no copy of this historic source on the web, I purchased one which had been in a university library. The pages were still uncut and so cannot have been read since it was published! A pdf copy is on the website in case anyone feels they would like to consult this popular tome!

⁴ *Seed Germination Theory and Practice*, Norman C. Deno 1993

⁵ *The Iris*, Brian Mathew 1981

NOTE

Knowing that some members are interested in Sir Michael Foster, I have placed a copy of his *Bulbous Irises* on the website. This was a lecture given by him in 1892 and later published by the RHS. <http://www.beardlessiris.org/reviews/bulbous-irises.pdf>

Whence they came. **Philip Jones**

The Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris in North America publishes a seed list each year with over three hundred donations of seed from its members. There are only eight very committed donors responsible for a great fund of seed. Last year I turned to the final pages of the seed list for inspiration and chose seed from the section on the species that was collected in the wild. The locations of the seed and the names of the collectors were listed and any special determining individual qualities of the plant was noted.

My main focus last year was on different types of *I. douglasiana* which is the most common of the species. From thirty possibilities I chose five packets: small, tall and medium, one that was unusual in having narrow leaves and another that had white flowers. *I. douglasiana* is a tough specimen and is unlike the others in that it grows on the coast rather than inland. It is also different from the rest in having branched stems and can have eight to nine flowers per stem. The other species are not branched and have one or two flowers. *I. douglasiana* can be described as the backbone of the modern hybrids.

This year the focus is on *I. innominata*, commonly regarded as the most attractive of the species. It was only discovered in 1928 and was an instant success and perhaps was too easily seen as a readily available garden plant. Unfortunately the heavy handed methods of some of the collectors have left it vulnerable but now there seems to be a law or common agreement not to harvest its seed in the wild. This year the seed list has only two donations of this most important iris, one of which was from a garden and the other without any specific reference as to its origin. However, this has led to a widening of my interest in the species to include the hybrids found in the wild. In his *Hybridisation and Speciation in the Pacific Coast Iris* (1959) Lee W Lenz wrote about the various locations where these natural hybrids occur. Of the eleven main species only *I. munzi* did not figure, perhaps partly because of its location being further south than most of the other species. Lenz's study was made almost sixty years ago and the state of affairs of the species and hybrids in the wild may have changed.

The good news is that I have been able to order seed from three locations of *I. douglasiana* x *I. innominata* and from five locations of *I. tenax* x *I. innominata*. I have also ordered some other species as well as *I. tenax*.

I have grown the species in the past but without any special reason or focus. I hope that moving other plants out and giving an exclusive space to these species and their hybrids collected in the wild will make it easy and interesting to look back and be able to see the beginnings of the happening of the PCIs. This is whence they came.

Philip likes to work mainly with the PCI species. John, examples on the facing page, prefers to hybridise his own to get these very vibrant colours and strong structures. One garden where they have gone.

One Garden Where They have Gone.
John Taylor's garden, Eidolia Park,
250km west of Sydney, Australia



Extending Bloom Season by Any Means—Terry Aitken Brita Carson

Terry Aitken wrote this first of all for the 2017 *Year Book* and it was about Bearded but it also applies to Beardless which is my particular passion now that I am older and hopefully wiser. The many Beardless are easier to grow in our wet and often sunless temperate climate.

Terry wrote this account when he and Barbara were making a garden for iris visitors to see, “Early rebloom Bearded were not wonderful except they provided colour when not much else was around. Getting quality flowers – substance, form and strong colours – came later. An early acquisition was ‘Forever Blue’ (Chapman ’97), a SDB from eastern Canada. My strategy was to cross the best rebloomers with the best spring bloomers. First generation children were recessive – usually. An exception was ‘Fairy Fireworks’ (Aitken ’14) (‘Fairy Rings’ x ‘Forever Blue’) which produced a plant that did sequential spring bloom which lasted right through Tall Bearded season – almost two months! A new concept was born! Several other SDBs behaved in a similar fashion. ‘Spring into Summer’ being another.”

Terry has produced many Siberians that rebloom, extend their bloom or have sequential bloom. Terry is also aiming for year round bloom and some of his Siberians aren’t far from it but they are stopped by frost. So many clumps open almost all their flowers at once and are then quickly over but Sequential Bloom produce flowers that open gradually over a much longer time so bloom time goes on for so much longer.

‘Moonstone Marvel’ (below) is a midseason Sib. with extended bloom into



‘Moonstone Marvel’ (Aitken ’17)

August. Branched stems carry 4 or 5 buds with more on summer bloom. And it also reblooms again in September but for this month the buds are down in the foliage.

It has good increase - a “clumper”. The flowers are rounded and overlapping. Standards are flat and ruffled. There appears to be a soft yellow layer within the petals overlaid by a soft sky blue layer predominantly around the edges - the “marvel”. The signals are mid yellow blending out onto the falls and

submerged under the light blue. There are burgundy hairline veins, deep in the signal that trickle out to mid falls. This plant is a fertile diploid. The cross is line bred for extended bloom.

Sdlg. # 12-1A: (O3SIB-1: ('Reddy or Not' x 'Hello Yellow') X 'Haleakala' 'Reddy Or Not' (Aitken '01), parentage unknown.

'Hello Yellow' is a midseason from Bob Hollingworth's stable and a repeater. Terry has noticed that a lot of their own repeaters have 'Hello Yellow' in them. See inside back cover for photographs.

'Haleakala' is also a repeater for Terry, but not for Marky Smith, the hybridiser, who lives on the wrong side of the Cascade Mountains! Seems most unfair. You will notice many other Siberians that are Rebloomers, or Repeat Bloomers or Sequential Bloomers, that Terry has hybridised. Look at the website for Salmon Creek Gardens. He must have the perfect weather combinations. He thinks the soil temperature is most important. In his case not too hot but in my case not hot enough in mid-late summer. Experimentation is needed here to try to increase the temperature of the soil.



'Burgundy Fireworks' (Aitken '13), a Dip with lavender pink standards, burgundy falls and a blue blaze. Sequential bloom.



'Majestic Overtures', (Aitken '06) a Tet with a good rebloom from parent 'Coronation Anthem' X unknown. 'Coronation Anthem' (Hollingworth '90) influence can be seen in this plant.

As well as his great success with repeat and extended rebloom Siberians Terry has hybridised many Japanese irises that rebloom, three of which are shown below.



‘Essence of Summer’

‘Midnight Fireworks’

‘Red Repeater’

Extended Bloom Jennifer Hewitt

This is what Currier McEwen noticed many years ago and called ‘repeat bloom’ (he is the father or grandfather of so much of what we do today!). From the picture of ‘Madeleine Hamilton’ (facing page, top left) it is clear that there has been a gap of about 3-4 weeks between earlier flowers and the present one and he preferred extended bloom rather than rebloom as they were then defined, i.e. a gap of several months between spring/summer and autumn flowerings. That was first noticed and encouraged with bearded irises and while Currier bred some such Siberians and Japanese, he worked more actively for repeat bloom. ‘Exuberant Encore’ and ‘Ever Again’ were two tets and the first did perform at Cleeton a few times, but the earlier diploid ‘Soft Blue’ did particularly well in the RHS Trials at Wisley. I now have it again and am wondering if it will ‘do’ for me in a warmer garden. But ‘Madeleine Hamilton’ does regularly repeat for Madeleine herself in the garden next to my former one so Cleeton can be a suitable spot.

‘Coquet Waters’, a small-flowered near-species Siberian, was first seen blooming in autumn in Northumberland by Mike McCarthy, chairman of the now-defunct Remontant Group, who begged a piece. It is in the National Collections but I’ve not heard of it repeating or reblooming. Marjorie Brummitt’s ‘Violet Repeat’, also in the Collections, usually waited until September or later and with me tended to bloom in either June or later but not both in one year. Probably I should have fed and watered it better.

For about 9 years I’ve had Currier’s ‘Little Centennial’ which is reported to rebloom or repeat but never for me. In fact it never flowered until I moved house. It has now bloomed well for two years and happens to be in a north-east-facing bed so I’ve anticipated Brita’s suggestion by chance. It gets early to mid-morning sun at the most, and I’ve let it set bee pods for GBI and BIS. Does this affect rebloom or repeat bloom? There’s nothing showing at present (August) so it’s wait and see.



Sequential Bloom

Brita Carson

Left - 'Madeleine Hamilton' Tet (Jennifer Hewitt '02) a sequential bloomer which sometimes repeats in August. You can almost see the influence of 'Coronation Anthem' Tet (repeat bloomer) in the flower.

Right - 'Atlantic Crossing' Tet (Olga Wells '05). Olga got this seed from Currier McEwen through the BIS seed exchange but without known parentage. A reliable sequential bloomer, and also repeat bloomer as can be seen in this photo with the *Hemerocallis* in the background. The daylilies start flowering in mid-July with me, just after the Siberians in May/June, so 'Atlantic Crossing' is a firm favourite and they altogether make a lovely display of strong vibrant colours.

I have crossed it with one of Terry's sequential bloomers, 'Majestic Overtures' Tet, so it will be interesting to see the results. 'Peter Hewitt' Tet, can sometimes extend flowering for another month.

Please take photos of later flowering Beardless to show what good effects they can create. Please include the names of the plants or just give descriptions. It would be interesting for members to see their photos included in the next *Review*. Please also let us know your feeding and watering policy around and just after flowering time.

I need to ask future contributors to email me their material by Mid-September-October 1 to have any chance of getting the *Review* out by next Christmas. I need to have a couple of months to put it together and get it proofed and printed.

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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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A small sample of John Taylor's PCIs. He has so many that he has stopped naming them. What a delightful problem to have.





'Hello Yellow' (Bob Hollingworth '99) ©Ensata Gardens



'Haleakala' (Marky Smith, '04) ©Aitkens Salmon Creek
'Hello Yellow' is the pod parent of 'Haleakala'