



A Passion for Wild Irises, Lilies and Serviceberries

by
Pat Holloway

During the winter of 1997, I received a telephone call from Fairbanksan, Mr. Larry Duffy who told me about his search for unusual and interesting wild irises (*Iris setosa* ssp. *interior*). Years ago, Edith Holm got him interested in searching for a wild white iris, and his interest expanded to include all kinds of variations in size, shape and color. He claimed he had a wine red-colored wild iris, and quite frankly, I only half believed him. Never have I heard of a red wild iris [And therefore it couldn't possibly exist, right?], and I assumed he found one of the common royal blue iris with maybe some hints of red. This past summer, Mr Duffy came to the Garden and donated two of his irises to our collection. One plant was a very large white iris that grows to 40 inches tall, and the second had a single, stunning wine red flower! I owe Mr Duffy a very big apology, and I deserve a good drubbing in the compost pile for thinking I knew everything there was to know about wild iris colors.



Mr Duffy spent years wandering the byways and grassy wetlands of the Interior selecting interesting and unusual irises. He registered some of these plants with the American Iris Society and has given them interesting Lakota Sioux names. We plan to showcase all of his named selection in the Garden, but I warned Mr. Duffy, he had better have plenty of plants to sell. Everyone will want some of his cultivars, especially the wine red iris he named 'Kiyuksa'. At the end of this article is a list and description of Mr. Duffy's cultivars.

Not one week after Mr. Duffy's visit, I met a woman in the Garden who wanted to talk about wild irises. Mary would only give her first name, but she told me a fascinating story of homesteading in the 1950's on Steele Creek Road. She and her husband came to Alaska in 1952. His work took him out of town for weeks on end. Mary was left on her own in Fairbanks. An acquaintance mentioned they were abandoning a homestead on Steele Creek and moving to the 'lower 48'. They offered the homestead to Mary for the price of the log cabin on the property. Mary didn't hesitate to buy the homestead for \$800, much to her husband's chagrin. He didn't think she could handle a homestead by herself while he worked out of town, but Mary stuck to her decision.

Mostly by herself, Mary "proved up" on the homestead. She received a lot of assistance from the researchers and workers at the Fairbanks Experiment Farm. They taught her what to grow, how to grow it, and how to keep animals alive in winter. In one of her many conversations with people at the Experiment Station, she mentioned the abundance of wild irises growing on her homestead. One of the workers asked if she ever found a white iris, would she give a plant to him? She readily agreed.

More than forty-five years later, she found her white iris, and she stopped by the Experiment Farm to fulfill her promise. She doesn't remember the name of the gentleman who asked for the white iris, but she did remember the assistance everyone gave her so many years ago. She wanted to make sure the white iris got back to the Experiment Farm as a token of her appreciation. Mary's iris is planted in the Robert Speck Memorial Cutting Garden in the northeast corner near the walkway into the Family Food Garden. Thank you, Mary, for a very nice surprise!

Alaska Iris Cultivars

by
Larry Duffy

Below is a list of Alaska's wild iris cultivars collected from the wild since 1972. Some of them have been registered with the American Iris Society.

'Wiyanna' (Blushing Maiden, Plant Number WI-3). Collected from the wild in 1972. Flower stalks are 30-36 inches in height and have 2-3 branches. Four to seven lavender-pink flowers are borne on each stalk. Some of the flowers have darker veining and vary in coloration. Falls vary from 2-3 inches across. Buds are mauve and flowers have yellow and white markings at their base. Style arms are of the same coloration as the falls with lavender overtoning at the crest.

'Iktomi' (Wild One, Plant Number WI-7). Collected from the wild in 1972. Flowers are lavender-blue with a large white blotch on the falls. The base of the bud and the perianth tube are almost black with the rest of the bud having some blue and white marbling. Style branches are tinted rose with a dark purple streak through the middle. Stigma and crest areas are dark blue. Flower stalks are 36 - 41 inches tall. The stalks have three branches with a total of six flowers per stalk. Flowers are 3-4 inches in size.

'Tatankaska' (White Buffalo, Plant Number WI-13). Collected from the wild in 1972. The 3 - 3.5-inch flowers are white with some yellow streaking or veining. Style arms are white and the flowerbase is lemon yellow. Buds are cream, changing to white before opening. Flower stalks grow 30-36 inches in height and have 2-3 branches.

'Hehaka sapa' (Black Elk, Plant Number WI-17). Collected from the wild in 1972. This is a purple-blue variation having 3.5-4 inch flowers varying from navy blue to purple shades. Falls have yellow and white streaking at the base. Spathes and immature seed pods have purple shading. Buds are a deep blue color. Flower stalks are 30-36 inches in height and have 2-3 branches.

'Wanikiya' (Ghost Dance, Plant Number WI-29). Collected from the wild in 1979. A pale lavender-blue form with flowers fading to almost white. Some flowers have blue veining or streaking while others have blue overtoning. Style arms are white and the buds are a pale blue. Three to 3.5-inch flowers are carried on stalks growing 24-36 inches in height and having 2-3 branches.

'Wahupa wa' (White Dove, Plant Number WI-31). Collected from the wild in 1980. White, 2.5 - 3.5-inch flowers are borne on stalks that grow 24-30 inches in height. The stalks have 2-3 branches. Buds and style arms are white with some yellow at the base of the falls. The leaves vary from 0.5 to 1 inch in width. Flowers and plant are more delicate looking than most wild iris plants.

'Itazipejuta' (Medicine Bow, Plant Number WI-35). Collected from the wild in 1981. A purple-red form having 3 - 3.5 inch flowers. Style arms are of a lighter coloration with a purple streak through the middle. Flowers are carried on 30-36 inch stalks which have 2-3 branches. Buds are purple.

'Blota hunka' (Warrior's Blood, Plant Number WI-54). Collected from the wild in 1984. A wine-colored form having 3.5 - 4-inch flowers borne on stalks that grow 24 - 30 inches in height. The flower stalks have 2-3 branches. Buds are a dark maroon and the style arms are of a lighter coloration with a middle streak the same color as the falls. Falls have white streaking at their base and some purple-red overtoning.

'Mahpiyaska' (White Cloud, Plant Number WI-30). Collected from the wild in 1979. A white form that has flower stalks up to 40 inches high. A healthy plant can produce over 320 flowers in a season.. Stalks have 2-4 branches with 4-8 flowers each. Flowers are 3- 3.5 inches wide and have white petals with lemon yellow at the base. Style arms are white, and buds vary from white to very pale blue.

'Kiyuksa' (Betrayed, Plant Number WI-67). Flowers from this wine-colored form vary from 3-4 inches wide and are borne on stalks up to 36 inches tall. Falls have white streaking at their base. Style arms are of a lighter color and have a wine-colored streak along the middle. Buds are a deep wine red and flower stalks have 2-3 branches. Flowers are flatter than most setosa types.

Throughout his travels and studies of the wild iris, Mr. Duffy has noted the following variation in the species: flower size varies from 2.5 inches to 4 inches. Height varies from 12 inches to 41 inches. Flower color range includes white, ice blue, wine, pink, lavender pink, lavender, lilac, purple, blue, lavender blue, violet and half white/half blue. I wonder what he will discover next?

More from Mr. Duffy's Garden

Not only has Mr Duffy grown interesting irises, his yard is a test garden for a variety of perennials. He grows most of his plants in containers, and evaluates them for winter hardiness and usefulness in the landscape. He has tested roses, lilies, serviceberries, and lilacs at his home on Chena Hot Springs Road. His recommendations for serviceberries (saskatoons) and lilies are shown below. We will continue his recommended list of roses and lilacs in the next issue of the Review.

Recommended Serviceberries* by Larry Duffy

Recommended:

'Honeywood'
'Northline'
'Pembina'
'Strata'
'Smokey'
'Theissen'

Not recommended:

'Regent'



*Illustration from Alaska Trees and Shrubs.
USDA Ag Handbook 410.*

*No serviceberry should be planted in the same area as mountain juniper or the native Alaskan form (*Juniperus communis*). These junipers have a disease to which the serviceberry acts as the alternate host. This rust can make both families look unsightly and completely ruin the berry crop in some years. All serviceberries appear to be susceptible. Other ornamental shrubs may be affected by this disease such as crabapples, cotoneaster and roses.

Lily Trials

by
Larry Duffy

Cultivar names preceded by an *, are highly recommended, All others grow well. The cultivar name is followed by plant height in inches and flower color.

'Chinook', 29-30 inches, salmon
*'Pirate', 30-36 inches, red
'Connecticut King', 36-48 inches, yellow
'Nova', 24-30 inches, white
Mid-Century Hybrids Mixed, 24-30 inches, various colors
'Enchantment', 24-30 inches, orange
'Scarlet Emperor', 24-30 inches, red
'Juliana', 24-30 inches, pink
'Moonson', 24-36 inches, yellow
'Firebrand'
'First Impression'
'Profile'
'Polar Bear', 12-18 inches, white
'Red Tiger', 30-36 inches, red
'Prosperity', 30-36 inches, yellow
'Ming Yellow', 30-36 inches, yellow
'Connecticut Lemonglow', 30-36 inches, yellow
'Twilight'
*'Embers', 30-36 inches, red-orange
'Orange Glow', 24-30 inches, orange
*'Jasper', 24-30 inches, rose
*'Nutmegger', 30-36 inches, yellow
'Yellow Star', 30-36 inches, yellow
'Bon Bons', 24-30 inches, various
'Golden Gleam', 24-30 inches, yellow
'Pink Tiger', 24-30 inches, pink
*'Citronella', 24-30 inches, yellow
Harlequin Hybrids, 36-48 inches, various
*'Skookum', 30-36 inches, yellow
'Southern Belles', 30-36 inches, pink
'Burgundy', 30-36 inches, red
'Amber Gold', 30-36 inches, yellow
*'Connecticut Yankee', 36-48 inches, orange
'Hornbacks Gold', 30-36 inches, yellow

'White Princess', 30-36 inches, white
*'Zeus', 30-36 inches, yellow
*'Bittersweet', 30-36 inches, orange
'Black Butterfly'
*'Brenda Watts', 30-36 inches, pink
'Chicora', 30-36 inches, pink
'Ethelwait'
'Red Jewels', 30-36 inches, red
*'Rose Queen', 30-36 inches, rose
*'Scarlett', 30-36 inches, orange-red
*'Sally', 30-36 inches, salmon
'Tiger Babies', 30-36 inches, pink
'Harlequin Jewels', 48-60 inches, various
*'Viva', 48-84 inches, orange
*'Spring Morn', 30-36 inches, pink
Paisley Hybrids, 36-60 inches, various
Fiesta Hybrids, 36-60 inches, various
Lilium canadense flavum, 24-36 inches, yellow
Lilium tankongense, 24-36 inches, yellow
Lilium pumilum, 36-60 inches, red-orange

The following cultivars are highly recommended but are still being tested:

*'Tinkerbell', 48 inches, pink
*'Fairest', 36-48 inches, pink
*'Doeskin', 36-48 inches, peach
*'Sculptor', 48-60 inches, pink
*'Red Velvet', 36-60 inches, red
*'Sundrenched', 48-60 inches, yellow
*'St. Patrick', 48-60 inches, yellow

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