

WISCONSIN-ILLINOIS NARGS

THE NORTHERN OUTCROP

A Rock Garden Newsletter

July 2016

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Our chapter may host a mini-convention next May. Per Lois Kinlen and Jane LaFlash who are chairing this venture, we're moving ahead slowly for a possible event the evening of Friday, May 19 and a full day on May 20. Thanks to all of you who offered to help. More details will be available later.

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Iris reticulata

Anything that blooms in early spring is appreciated and *Iris reticulata* is one of the earliest bloomers. I have tried several cultivars with limited success and blamed it on 'user error.' Maybe not. Alan McMurtrie hybridized *Iris reticulata* to offer more colors. The March issue of *The Plantsman* first published Alan's article about Alan's his endeavors and the availability of his cultivars. Below are excerpts from the article, including some cultivation techniques. The full article can be seen [here](#). It contains much more information on hybridizing, including other species involved as well as efforts to get cultivars introduced and more pictures. Jean Halverson, editor

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Cultivars derived from *Iris reticulata*, conveniently known as Reticulata irises, have flowers that are mostly shades of blue or purple. Exceptions include near-white 'Natascha' from the 1970s and pale blue and yellow 'Katharine Hodgkin'. The last, along with the similar 'Frank Elder' and 'Sheila Ann Germaney', are sterile hybrids between *I. histrioides* and *I. winogradowii*. Other recent developments include sports from 'Katharine Hodgkin' and 'Harmony', wild collected bicolours, and a couple of sterile hybrids between 'Cantab' and *I. winogradowii*.

New Reticulata iris cultivars are mostly sports from existing cultivars selected by companies growing them at field-scale. However, I am improving the range of Reticulata irises by using material collected from the wild, including *I. danfordiae*, a yellow flowered species, that I collected in Turkey 30 years ago. My aim is to produce cultivars with new colours and patterns that are robust, clump-forming and that come back year after year, while giving a modest number of blooms.

Iris danfordiae has beautiful lemon yellow flowers with a pleasant scent, but the plant does not reappear in the garden. Dig it up after its first year or two of flowering and all you tend to find is numerous bulblets. Growers speak

of the original bulbs as having 'shattered' – they planted nice large bulbs, but all they find in their place is numerous rice-grainsize bulbs. When bought from a bulb supplier they usually have sufficient energy to regenerate two bloom-size bulbs for the following year. But conditions in most gardens are not good enough to produce further bloom-size bulbs



These hybrids have been raised under reasonably harsh conditions in Toronto, Canada, so they are fairly robust. For long term plantings, resist the urge to initially plant large bulbs close together to get an instant clumping effect. Give the bulbs a reasonable amount of space. I recommend replanting Reticulatas every two or three years, especially if bulbs are planted close together. It is actually a good idea to plant some in another part of the garden. And if you plant some in a sunny location and some in a shady location, you can extend the growing season. It is also a good idea to plant some early varieties and some later ones. If you plant seeds or bulblets, be sure to cover them each winter with a mulch of leaves, or better yet, straw to keep the soil surface frozen and prevent premature germination or growth. Once the snow has melted you can remove most of the straw.

By the time the leaves die down in late June they have grown to 45– 60cm in length. A bulb forms at the base of each leaf, so if you damage the leaves you are directly damaging next year's bloom. If you need to store the bulbs out of the soil then dig them up just as the leaves are dying down. Store them over summer in mesh bags hanging in a cool, dry location. If you dig up bulbs at the end of summer or early autumn, and leave them unplanted for a couple of weeks, they can go soft. If you do this, make sure you replant them within two days. Bulbs dug up in early summer and properly dried are fine in storage.

Gardeners can benefit from the production of numerous bulblets. Simply replant them closer to the soil surface, like first year bulbs from seed, at 1–1.5cm depth. If they are left at the base of the bulb, as they would be when in a clump, not all of them will have sufficient energy to get a leaf up. For instance, in my garden mature bulbs typically place themselves at 7cm depth. They will form clumps. If you have problems with bulbs rotting or not reappearing, make a mound of soil and plant them in that. If you have problems growing them in a trough then change the compost to improve drainage.



Iris 'Storm' will hopefully be made available commercially by UK nurseries

Identified as 06-EJ-2

Alan said Odyssey Bulbs and White Flower Farm are two US sources of some of his cultivars.

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Upcoming Meetings

- July and August—no meetings planned, enjoy the summer!
- September 17 Plant Sale at Jean Halverson's garden in Dodgeville, WI. This is our fundraiser for the year, so pot up those extra seedlings and divisions to bring to the sale.
- October 15 A fall hike in the Southern Kettle Moraine. Damon Smith grew up in SE Wisconsin and has spent a lot of time in the Kettle Moraine. He will lead us on a hike to see the interesting plants, geology and fall foliage.
- November 19 Noon-Pot Luck and Annual meeting at Dane County Ext Offices-1 Fen Oak Ct, Madison, WI. Our Annual Meeting will include Awards and election of officers after a delicious pot luck lunch. The program will be 'Travels With Steve' as Steve Lesch continues his trip to Africa
- December 3 9-4 Seed Sorting-Place to be determined. We will hold our annual workshop to pack seeds for the NARGS Seedex. There will be pizza for lunch and door prizes throughout the day.

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Editor Jean Halverson

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Membership Renewal Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

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Dues are \$10 per year. Please clip this form and send it along with your check (payable to WI-IL NARGS) to: Jean Halverson PO Box 101, Dodgeville WI 53533

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