

Vilmorin's Orchid-flowered Irises

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Garden Irises have always been highly esteemed in the Vilmorin family. The late M. Henry de Vilmorin had enlarged the collection left by his father with all the varieties he could obtain bringing the total to over two hundred named varieties (not counting many seedlings) in 1899, the year of his death. His son, M. Philippe de Vilmorin who had inherited the taste of his ancestors for this beautiful flower, found ready at hand the best materials to work from and soon decided to carry on the improvement that his father had begun. Judging from the size of the flowers of some of the wild species such as *Amas* (syn. *asiatica*), *trojana*, and *cypriana* which are all of a blue tone what could be achieved by passing into them some of the other colors, he tried first to do by crossing them with different varieties; some of them, selfed, were also sown.

The results of his first attempts and the parentage of some of the best novelties are described by himself in a paper (published in the *Revue Horticole*, 1908, p. 544,*) in which he speaks of both his and his father's work. *Diane*, *Loute*, *Isoline*, *Alcazar*, *Barbe Bleue*, *Oriflamme*, and *Goliath* were cited and *Isoline* and *Diane* very accurately reproduced natural size in a beautiful colored plate. Many of these first varieties put on the market by the firm are now well-known in America and need no comment as to their value. In that paper M. de Vilmorin notes that the whole collection of Victor Verdier, who had been one of the most famous raisers of garden irises, had been purchased by his firm in 1903. This collection consisted of about two hundred named varieties, out of which some one hundred and fifty had been raised and named by Verdier himself. Most of these varieties have been added to the general collection grown at Verrières; only a few of inferior merit were dropped. The best of that collection such as *Prosper Laugier*, *Edouard Michel*, *Nuée d'orage*, *Jeanne d'Arc*, *Parc de Neuilly*, and *La Neige* have been introduced along with the Vilmorin varieties and have found their way to America where their names often appear in reports. It is needless to speak longer of these pioneers of the 'orchid flower' series to which I am now coming, for it has been my privilege to assist M. de Vilmorin in raising these very fine varieties which have so successfully fulfilled the plans that he had laid out for himself. I know the work it has involved, for many hundred seedlings have been thrown away that would have delighted many people.

Once the blood of the large flowering varieties alluded to above was passed into the new strain and a sufficient mixture of colors obtained, crosses were given up as it was found that selfed varieties gave a scope of variation quite as wide and sometimes better than direct crosses. Some other varieties were also sown with some success.

From that time, some fifteen years ago, the greatest care has been given to the choice of seedlings; one standard has been used in the selection of seedlings from the many thousands that have been raised in the course of years and that standard is, large size of flower, good substance to the petals, fine colour, and vigour and hardness of the plant.

It would take too long to list all the varieties which have been raised and named at Verrières and added to the collection; only a few have been discarded afterwards and the total reaches nearly one hun-

*We hope to reprint this article at a later date. —Ed.

dred. It will be sufficient, I think, to name those varieties which have been sent to the trade and the years in which they were raised and introduced in brackets like this (1909-1918) and to describe only the more recent introductions.

Certif. means that the plant has won a Certificate of Merit from the Société nationale d'Horticulture de France and the year,—its name and description being thus registered in that year.

Alcazar. (1905-1910) Certif. 1909.

Ambassadeur. (1909-1920) Certif. 1918. A strong and tall plant, with stalks nearly 3 ft. high and large flowers of very good substance, the falls broadly spreading and of a dark velvety color somewhat on the style of Jacquesiana. It is considered one of the finest irises raised at Verrières and a great advance upon similar ones in the squalens and neighboring sections.

Ambigu. (1909-1916) Certif. 1918. A semi-dwarf and semi-early plant with flowers of reddish purple.

Archeveque. (1903-1911).

Ballerine. (1907-1920) Certif. 1910. A vigorous plant, whose tall and branching stems reach over three feet. The flowers which are among the largest of the pallidas measure 5.2 inches from tip to tip of the segments. They are a self blue-violet with falls of a deeper shade, the standards large, rounded and somewhat frilled at the edges. It is among the strongest scented of varieties and altogether a splendid plant.

Caprice. (1898-1904).

Candelabre. (1903-1909).

Cherubin. (1902-1911).

Cluny. (1910-1920) Certif. 1918. Tall and early pallida, 40 inches with flowers of large size, almost self blue-lilac and long falls slightly deeper in color.

Dejazet. (1906-1914) Certif. 1918.

Diane. (1902-1911) Certif. 1914.

Eldorado. (1905-1910) Certif. 1909.

Grevin. (1908-1920).—A semi-dwarf (27 inches) and semi-late variety with strong stems and very large flowers of deep purple, the standards shaded yellow.

Isoline. (1898-1904) Certif. 1905.

Loute. (1897-1904) Certif. 1905.

Magnifica. (1908-1920) Certif. 1914. The largest flowered iris ever raised at Verrières and a very strong plant with large and glaucous foliage; stems tall (4 ft.), flowers over six inches from tip to tip and of a violet-blue tone, the falls long and of a deeper color than the standards which are also large and very rounded; they are sweetly scented and open in mid-season. An exceptionally fine plant.

Médrano (1908-1920)—A semi-dwarf and semi-early variety with good sized flowers of a bronzy claret colour.

Miriam. (1898-1904) Certif. 1905.

Molière. (1909-1920) Certif. 1918. An early and semi-dwarf variety with large purple flowers, the falls dark and velvety, the style branches broad and yellowish.

Monsignor. (1903-1907) Certif. 1909.

Opera. (1906-1916) Certif. 1914.

Oriflamme. (1903-1907) Certif. 1905.

Parisiana. (1906-1911) Certif. 1910.

Raffet. (1903-1920). One of the latest to flower, a semi-dwarf with flowers of nearly pure blue and long segments.

Tamerlan. (1898-1904).

Trianon. (1906-1921) Certif. 1918. A semi-late and semi-dwarf

variety with flowers of only moderate size but of a very delicate colour, difficult to describe because a mixture of yellow, purple, and blue; the standards may be said to be of a very light salmon (isabelle) tone, while the falls are yellow washed with blue, almost unique among irises.

Turco. (1913-1921). Semi-dwarf and semi-late with medium flowers, the standards rosy-lilac, the falls yellow washed with blue.

These last two varieties have been introduced chiefly on account of their fresh and uncommon color.

This list does not, of course, bring to a close the number of new varieties raised at Verrières. There are many others, some of which have been exhibited or much admired at the grounds by American visitors. Although it is too soon to speak of them, as they are not sufficiently tested or propagated, one of them, *Alliés* may be cited, not only because of its fine colour, but more especially perhaps for the fact that it has flowered in the fall for three successive years. Flowers are sometimes produced in the autumn but only occasionally, although some varieties show a more or less marked tendency to do so: Will *Alliés* be the first step towards a twice flowering strain?

I do not know yet what the best new varieties, such as *Dominion*, *Lord of June* and others about which the press speaks very highly really are, but I think the above can compete with any of them. If size alone is considered, few can produce a larger flower than *Magnifica*, few have a better way of standing up than *Ambassadeur* and this is still further enhanced by its size, fine colour, and height and strength of scape. Then to people who are fond of sweet scented varieties I would recommend *Ballerine* for a comparison, since besides its scent it has size and color. Of the colours themselves it is best not to speak as an appreciation of them depends chiefly upon individual taste; one may call dull a color that another declares lovely. Unfortunately some colours are still deficient in that new series of 'Orchid flowering' irises and among them pure white and yellow,—the *variegata* and *Flavescens* do not seem to cross easily with *macrantha*.

Judging from the figures cited above readers may be surprised at the number of years that have elapsed between the time the variety was raised and the year it was sent out.

This may be explained; 1, by the two to four years a seedling may take to bloom; 2, by the time it may take to fix its characteristics. For a new iris as well as in other plants, may not show its real value at first, there is always a period of uncertainty during which it may improve or grow worse and this may last for some years during which the raiser has to observe his new plants very carefully. Some of the finest varieties of the above list were not much more striking than others when first selected in the seed bed. It is only after they were established that their great superiority became evident. The reverse was true with others that were accordingly abandoned.

Altogether raising seedlings for introduction may take from eight to twelve years, sometimes more, and it involves a large amount of work.

Note. The reason why any variety can produce forms so widely varying that they can be classed in another section, is possibly due to the fact, admitted by many a botanist, that there are but two good and pure species in the group of the so-called *germanicas*, viz. *I. pallida* and *I. variegata*; the others would be mere garden forms and thus vary more or less widely. It explains how easy it was for the first hybridists to get new things and how difficult it is now to obtain better ones.