

Blandy Garden

by Judy Keisling, *Missouri*

NESTLED IN THE ROLLING VIRGINIA HILLS ABOUT 60 MILES WEST of Washington, DC, 472 guest irises resided in nine perfectly manicured beds at the Blandy Experimental Farm at the State Arboretum of Virginia, also known locally as the Orland E. White Arboretum. The rain that had plagued us earlier in the day had subsided to a light mist as we got off the bus and made our way through what is known as “The Quarters,” an impressive brick structure that is believed to have originally served as slaves’ quarters for the Tuleyries, a private estate just to the west.

The iris beds, situated on a sunny slope behind the Quarters, were planted and maintained by Don and Ginny Spoon and Don’s son Bryan. In a brief conversation with Don over lunch I learned that the beds were mulched with wood chips and that no fertilizer or sprays were used; leaf spot on each plant was manually cleaned – a time consuming task, no doubt.

Immediately catching my eye was the colorful BODY AND SOUL (TB, Stahly, ‘99) with bright apricot yellow standards, slightly lighter hued falls and brilliant red beards. I counted 5 fans, each with 5 - 6 buds on this extremely well-branched specimen. Nearby, a clump of MADAM PRESIDENT (MTB, Thurman, ‘01) was holding court, her canary yellow standards and violet falls standing erect and sporting at least 7 buds on each of her stalks. Turning my head, the stark white self BUBBLES GALORE (TB, Ghio, ‘02) was screaming for attention – what a beauty this one was with excellent branching, clean foliage, and 6 buds on every stalk. Another Ghio introduction LIP SERVICE (TB, ‘01) was also showing off with violet standards touched gently with apricot around the edges, apricot falls with violet overlay, and light tangerine beards.

The intense deep purple black color of HOLLYWOOD NIGHTS (TB, Duncan, ‘01) appeared to be almost a true black in the subdued overcast lighting of the day. Its white spray-like pattern near the blue-violet beard provided a nice contrast. Again, this one had great

branching and bud count. One of my favorites, the lovely POND LILY (TB, E. Jones, '95), was in full glory, the pink influence on the violet falls showing up with an intensity not seen in my garden. LADY LAREE (TB, Barrows, '02) was also especially nice, wearing heavily washed violet standards and white falls with violet edges and violet beards reminiscent of the court gown of a lady of the realm.

DELIGHTFUL KID (BB, Innerst, '01) was truly a delight to see with its pink standards, white falls trimmed in grape-red, and pinkish red beards; this one reminded me of one of my granddaughters – dainty, sturdy, and character galore! The well-grown clump of ICE WINGS (BB, Craig, '01), with its pure white standards and falls that slightly shaded to blue, conjured up visions of skaters on a pond – great branching with lots of buds – I counted 12 buds on one of its stalks. Larry Lauer's BLIND FAITH (TB, '02), a lightly ruffled and laced light violet with darker edges on the falls and bright red beards, drew rave reviews from its admirers standing nearby.

Other outstanding iris seen in this garden included SILVER TRUMPETS (TB, Zurbigg, '03) a silverish-white space ager with trumpet-like appendages; CALEY MARIE (TB, Borglum, '01), white ground standards peppered blue, the white falls peppered blue on the edges and yellow beards; AUTUMN JOY (TB, D. Spoon, '01) a nicely ruffled reddish-violet plicata with light yellow edges on the standards and a deep reddish violet border on the white-grounded falls; DEB SUNSHINE (TB, Lineberger, '00, with golden yellow standards, creamy white falls and good bud count. RED THUMBPRINTS (BB, Cadd, '00) was a knockout with its light chocolate brown standards and falls highlighted with a reddish wash, making it easy to see where it got its name. HUNTER PINK (TB, Stanek, '00) was outstanding with its rose standards, baby pink falls, and red beards, as was RASPBERRY SILK (BB, D. Spoon, '00) another plicata — grounded white and splashed with deep raspberry in a broken color pattern, and pink tangerine beards. VERONA WIEKHORST (TB, Foster, '02) with creamy buff falls tinted lavender and reddish violet falls displayed 5 - 6 buds on each of her stalks.

As always seems to be the case, time in this garden was limited. There were so many wonderful irises in bloom in this garden; it was difficult to spend as much time as I would have liked looking at each and every one. All too soon it was time to move on. Thanks to Don, Ginny, Bryan and the staff at the Arboretum for making a visit to this garden a more than memorable occasion. 