

Red Irises

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THE BREEDING of red irises is one of the great, if not the greatest, challenges there is to the iris hybridizer today. Great blues, whites, yellows, pinks we have, and greater ones we will have in the future. To get these is largely a matter of building upon present stock. But can this be said with the same degree of certitude about reds? Perhaps, and perhaps not. In fact, there are those who say that there has been no real improvement in red irises over the years by breeding the best available reds. To make such a statement is to encompass the hybridizing efforts of scores, spanning more than a half century. It has been said that A. J. Bliss was breeding for reds when he produced the first "landmark" in iris breeding, DOMINION, in 1910. While DOMINION, itself, is purple, not red, it produced CARDINAL for Bliss when he crossed its pollen on to TROSUPERBA. CARDINAL was definitely redder than anything else at that time, but it still only remotely resembled the color from which it took its name. The next generation brought definite improvement when CARDINAL X ROSE MADDER produced the Dykes Medal winner, DAUNTLESS, a variety which is behind almost every important modern red variety.

Excepting those who devote their time and energy to the hybridization of red irises, there are few who number the reds now in commerce among their favorite irises. Compared to other colors, the reds have won few awards. In 1929, the Dykes Medal winner was DAUNTLESS, and in 1941, THE RED DOUGLAS was awarded that honor. These two reds were distinct advances in red hybridizing, and quite deserving of the honor bestowed upon them. Twenty-one reds have received an Award of Merit. These are: SEMINOLE, 1920; JOYCETTE and ETHEL PECKHAM, 1936; JUNALUSKA, 1937; CHEERIO and CHRISTABEL, 1938; E. B. WILLIAMSON and THE RED DOUGLAS, 1939; LIGHTHOUSE, 1940; RED GLEAM, 1941; CAPTAIN WELLS, COPPER ROSE, RED VALOR, and GARDEN FLAME, 1943; CASA MORENA and RANGER, 1946; GARDEN GLORY and SOLID MAHOGANY, 1947; THREE OAKS, 1949; CORDOVAN, 1951; EBONY ECHO, 1953; and BANG, 1960. Seventy-eight red irises have received an award of Honorable Mention. This recital of awards may sound impressive, at first, but when it is remembered that the American Iris Society has awarded the Dykes Medal to 28 tall bearded irises, the Award of Merit to 310 tall bearded irises, and that 1211 tall bearded irises have received Honorable Mention, red irises do not fare so well.

In the twenty-one popularity polls or symposiums of the American Iris Society, red irises come off little better. During the first ten years, an average of twelve red irises appeared on the symposium. During the last eleven years, this average fell to five red irises per year—less than half as many. For the first time since the poll was instituted in 1940, not a single red iris appeared on the 1959 symposium. This is the low point from the 1944 high when 15 red irises appeared.

The red iris with the longest standing on the symposium is THE RED DOUGLAS. This iris remained on the symposium from 1940 to 1955, except for 1950, when it was in the abortive Hall of Fame, and thus ineligible for a standing. THE RED DOUGLAS gained another distinction in 1942 when it ranked number two on the symposium, the highest rank ever attained by a red iris. Other

popular red irises have been SOLID MAHOGANY and CASA MORENA, both of which were on the symposium from 1945 to 1958, and RANGER, which was on the symposium from 1945 to 1957.

This may appear to be a dismal commentary on red irises, but it is neither dismal nor disheartening to those who apply themselves to the problem of creating a truly red iris. Instead, it offers a challenge; indeed, it is one of the most challenging problems in iris hybridizing today. Fortunately, the list of those meeting this challenge is growing long. The keen interest of these hybridizers was shown by the fact that the American Iris Society established two hybridizing robins devoted to the breeding of red irises before a special robin was created for any other color class.

Recently, I spent considerable time searching out the family trees of all the red irises currently being sold in iris catalogs. This research led me to the conclusion that there have been established four important lines which go to make up modern red irises. These four lines are based upon four different irises which were introduced during the short period, 1937 to 1942. These are: AZTEC COPPER (Kleinsorge 1939), RED GLEAM (Lapham 1939), THE RED DOUGLAS (J. Sass 1937), and REDWARD (Cook 1942). Actually, in my notes I record "MSC" rather than REDWARD as the progenitor of the fourth bloodline. Paul Cook's red irises are derived from an inbred line of MORNING SPLENDOR, SEMINOLE, and CINNABAR—"MSC" for short. REDWARD is probably the best known product of this inbred line.

There are also four other bloodlines which are important in red breeding, but not as important, so far, as the first four. These lines are based upon these irises: CHINA MAID (Milliken 1936), MATULA (H. P. Sass 1939), COLOR SERGEANT (H. F. Hall 1949), and CASA MORENA (DeForest 1943).

Speaking in general terms, the first four bloodlines can be identified with our foremost red hybridizers of today. AZTEC COPPER has figured importantly in the reds produced by Chet Tompkins and Tom Craig. RED GLEAM is behind the Greig Lapham and William McKee reds. THE RED DOUGLAS has been used in the creation of the Agnes Whiting and Chet Tompkins reds, and "MSC" forms the basis for the Cook reds and is now playing an important role in the creation of the Lapham reds.

Greig Lapham bloomed his first seedlings in 1925. In that year he got BELLE PORTER from a cross of SEMINOLE X TROOST. BELLE PORTER is behind both EDWARD LAPHAM and RED WAVES, two Lapham reds which were crossed together to produce PACEMAKER. RED GLEAM appears three times behind RED WAVES. PACEMAKER is apparently the apex of this line of breeding, for Lapham then began an outbreeding program. PACEMAKER was crossed to Cook's REDWARD to produce DRESS REHEARSAL. TOWN TALK, a Lapham red produced by crossing Douglas' DRUM MAJOR X COOK 745 (out of "MSC"), was crossed to DRESS REHEARSAL to produce HAPPY WANDERER, a 1957 introduction. DRESS REHEARSAL X DEFIANCE, a Tompkins red, gave FORWARD MARCH, which bloomed for the first time in 1956 and was introduced in 1960. FORWARD MARCH, a fine red in itself, is more important as a parent. I have seen three of the seedlings which Lapham has produced from FORWARD MARCH and know them to be fine reds. One in particular is the finest red I have ever seen. This is Lapham 13-58, which is out of (Cook 6954: Cook 4450 x PACEMAKER) X FORWARD MARCH. This dark red seedling is not only beautifully ruffled, but it is also completely devoid of haft markings even down in

the throat of the flower. These three seedlings from FORWARD MARCH break the pattern of being the product of outcrosses to unrelated reds, for the other parent in each case is either a Cook or a Lapham red. Thus, the pattern of breeding until the production of FORWARD MARCH had been, first, to cross two Lapham reds which were mostly out of Sass irises, and then to cross out in successive generations until all four of the bloodlines mentioned above were incorporated. In 1960, Lapham numbered only 15 red irises. Three of these fifteen had BANG as one parent. Two of these three had FORWARD MARCH as the other parent, and the third was out of DEFIANCE X BANG. His best red seedling for 1960 was Lapham 19-60, out of CHEERLEADER X FORWARD MARCH. CHEERLEADER, a 1958 Lapham introduction, is out of Cook 7850 X DEFIANCE, so Lapham 19-60 has Chet Tompkins' great breeder as a grand-parent on both sides.

Paul Cook has been linebreeding red irises since about 1927. His linebreeding program is based upon three irises: MORNING SPLENDOR, SEMINOLE, and CINNABAR. In the case of RELENTLESS (a 1942 seedling), the iris ETHEL PECKHAM was introduced into its breeding in 1935, and is the maternal grandmother of that iris. The very few red irises which Mr. Cook has introduced are in no way indicative of the progress which he has made with red breeding. The last red which he introduced was RELENTLESS, in 1948. This he crossed to REDWARD, a 1939 seedling also of "MSC" breeding, and obtained seedling 12848. A sibling of RELENTLESS, Cook 7942, was crossed to 745, another "MSC" product, and 9449 resulted. Cook 12848 X Cook 9449 gave Cook 9551, an iris which most anyone except Mr. Cook would have introduced, and one which, along with Cook 4450 (breeding similar to Cook 9551), has been used extensively by Mr. Cook in his red breeding during the past decade.

The object of Mr. Cook's long line of close breeding was to assemble all the favorable genes for red and to eliminate the deleterious ones. At about the time Mr. Cook produced his 9551, he decided that he had gone just about as far as he could go using his "MSC" line alone. So he began crossing out, following this by a couple of generations of backcrossing and sib crossing, and in 1959, he began to bring the separately derived lines together. Mr. Cook expects 1962 to be a crucial year in his red breeding program. Definite progress is being made, as evidenced by taller, better-branched stalks with larger and redder flowers.

Entering the red parade later than Mr. Lapham or Mr. Cook, but by now a recognized leader in the field is Chet Tompkins, creator of such well-known reds as EBONY ECHO, DEFIANCE, and HIGH BARBAREE. The marvelous reds which Mr. Tompkins has produced began in 1946 when there bloomed in his garden two seedlings, Tompkins 46-13 and Tompkins 46-40. The first of these was from CAPE BON X CASA MORENA and was named EBONY ECHO, 1953 Award of Merit winner. The second, the reciprocal cross of the first, when crossed to ARIA (another 1946 seedling), produced MANANA. EBONY ECHO and MANANA, and especially the latter, have figured heavily in Mr. Tompkins' breeding program. EBONY ECHO X MANANA gave GREAT DAY, a 1953 introduction. EBONY ECHO X TECHNICOLOR produced PRIVATEER, a brown-red self which was introduced in 1954. MANANA, when crossed to TECHNICOLOR, gave DEFIANCE. How DEFIANCE, a poor grower wherever I have seen it, can produce such wonderful seedlings is a thing for one to marvel about. And yet, some of our best reds today have DEFIANCE in their parentage.

However, Mr. Tompkins reports that his first hybridizing efforts using DEFIANCE were, with few exceptions, quite disappointing. These first efforts involved breeding DEFIANCE out to unrelated reds. When most of these DEFIANCE seedlings did not come up to his expectations, Mr. Tompkins decided that he should change his approach. So he began inbreeding his lines, and the first two from this inbreeding, RAMPAGE and STAMPEDE, were introduced in 1959.

Others are also getting fine reds from the Tompkins irises. Paul Cook has used EBONY ECHO in the outcrossing phase of his breeding program. Greig Lapham has obtained AMICUS, CHEERLEADER, and FORWARD MARCH from DEFIANCE. Mrs. Miriam Corey crossed EBONY ECHO X GARDEN GLORY to get GARNET ROYAL which, it is reported, will produce clean seedlings when crossed to badly hafted reds. Gordon Plough's EDENITE, which received 33 Honorable Mention votes in 1959, is from GREAT DAY X SABLE NIGHT. Mrs. Hazel Schmelzer's widely acclaimed CAPTAIN GALLANT is from a Tompkins seedling X PRIVATEER. Schreiner's new JUNGLE FIRES is out of ((ARGUS PHEASANT X PACEMAKER) X BRITANNIA) X DEFIANCE.

Another breeder of fine reds is Tom Craig. Mr. Craig's reds stem largely from a cross of TIFFANY X CHINA MAID, although he began hybridizing for reds about 1938 with a cross of THE RED DOUGLAS X E. B. WILLIAMSON. This 1938 cross produced ROSIRED, which he has used to some extent in later breeding. Craig soon discovered, in his breeding for "hot plicatas," that he could use his plans for plicatas to produce better reds. A cross of TIFFANY X CHINA MAID produced REDBOY, an iris which was introduced by Germaines of California, but which was not registered with the American Iris Society until 1958. REDBOY is a tall red, reported to have up to 25 flowers to a stalk. REDBOY X SULTAN'S ROBE gave SAVAGE and BALLGOWN. SAVAGE X (CORDOVAN X MOLTEN) gave BANG, 1960 Award of Merit winner and the only red to receive this award since EBONY ECHO won it in 1953. BANG is proving to be an excellent parent despite its haft markings. Mr. Lapham reports that BANG really surprised him as a breeder. Not only was the color in his 1960 seedlings out of BANG much improved, but the roughness of BANG was much lessened, and even deleted in some of the seedlings.

A new starmaker in the red-iris heavens is a hybridizer who has made a name for himself in other iris colors. Robert Schreiner's red introductions have been few and of recent years. Yet these few have been of very high quality. In 1957, Mr. Schreiner introduced FIRE BRIGADE, a rich and glowing red, which has in its parentage all four of the important red lines mentioned previously. In 1960, he introduced two reds, VELVET ROBE and JUNGLE FIRES, which came in for a great deal of attention at the 1960 Portland Meeting and which received the Honorable Mention award that year. A dark velvety red, out of TRIM X CALDRON, VELVET ROBE is currently being acclaimed by some as the best red ever to be introduced into commerce. Mr. Schreiner reports that he has been doing a considerable volume of red-iris breeding and has been expanding his efforts in this field because he believes he is making visible progress. In his expanded endeavors, use is being made of the Tompkins lines and the red x blend approach to better color.

It is not my intention to make this article an encyclopedia of hybridizers of red irises, but I should not close without briefly mentioning a few other persons who have made significant contributions to the parade of the reds. Men-

tion should be made of Jacob Sass, who produced THE RED DOUGLAS, Dykes Medal winner of 1941. THE RED DOUGLAS is behind Henry Sass's great reds, RED CHIEFTAIN and HUNTSMAN, and is also the pod parent of Mrs. Agnes Whiting's GARDEN GLORY, one of the best red parents of all times. GARDEN GLORY is behind almost every contender for the crown of today's best reds. A noteworthy exception is Richard Goodman's ROYAL RUBY. ROYAL RUBY is out of Goodman's RED HUSSAR X SAVAGE. RED HUSSAR, a bright red, has the unusual parentage of (Goodman dark olive-green seedling x GOLDEN SHELL) X (Goodman light olive-green seedling x GOLDEN SHELL). William J. McKee, originator of the much ballyhooed TRIM, was a devotee of linebreeding as he explained it in the *Half Century of Iris*. TRIM, the result of linebreeding seedlings from LIGHTS ON and RED GLEAM, is the pod parent of Schreiner's new VELVET ROBE. I should not fail to mention H. F. Hall, who created a line of reds quite different from the others. The culmination of Mr. Hall's work in this line was COLOR SERGEANT, behind which CARDINAL appears ten times.

Fred DeForest contributed two notable irises to irisdome. CASA MORENA, introduced in 1943, is a rich coppery brown which I consider to be one of the eight important irises in red breeding. It is behind most Tompkins reds and is also the pod parent of ARGUS PHEASANT, a brown much used in red breeding. The second notable DeForest red is TALL CHIEF, out of blend x red breeding. A deep, rich, glowing red self of superior form, TALL CHIEF is tall, well branched, and on a par with our best red introductions of today.

Where do we go from here? Fortunately, in every direction. Almost every conceivable approach is being pursued by those seeking what has proved to be until now the elusive red. Some are breeding the best reds available together. Others are breeding for color alone. Some are trying to put some of the qualities such as those found in the whites and blues into the reds. Some are trying linebreeding, while others are exploring the possibilities of even closer inbreeding by selfing the reds. There are also reports of hybridizers irradiating iris seeds, hoping to get a mutation to true red. Enough progress has been made to keep the hopes of those who hybridize for reds flourishing. Keep your eye on these people. Their hopes will be realized.

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Newest and Youngest Life Members

The newest—the 79th—is Mr. Richard C. Butler, of Little Rock, Arkansas, and the Regional Vice President for Region 22.

Probably the youngest is Susan Pope, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Foy Pope, of Memphis, Tennessee. Susan is 11, a sixth-grader (last school year), studies piano, and is a majorette. She joined the AIS in 1959. After a day of touring iris gardens, she said: "My feet are tired but my eyes aren't."