

Preparing for a Regional Anita Moran

Introduction

One of the scariest, frustrating, stressful and most rewarding things to do is volunteering to have your garden on a regional tour, other than volunteering for a National. I do not know how most regions do this I can only tell you of my experiences. The first thing I learned when I volunteered my garden is that you have to expect everything to happen the good, the bad, and the mundane. I was told normal regionals would get about 40 bearded guest and five or six beardless, well the new bed I made for Daylily seedlings was commandeered for the bearded guests that kept coming and coming and coming, (not complaining!!) and my pond area was cleaned out for the beardless.

The really nice thing about having a regional is it gives you an excuse to get rid of those irises you are not fond of and the impetus to toss those seedlings that really were not good at all and then redo your beds so that they can be walked through without damage to those precious seedlings that represent many years of crossing and testing. For me it was tall bearded that took the biggest hit. From 300 to just over 70 cultivars were kept the rest were given new homes via the rhizome sale.

The problem was that between the last time I was one of five guest gardens and now so many wonderful irises were introduced that I was unable to deny myself, well now these all had to move. I had always wanted to have an iris maze, so that's what I started the first five 8-foot by 5-foot sections were constructed with railroad ties as well as an 8-foot by 8-foot corner section. The dirt was delivered as was the sand, but compost was only safe to get in this area in the spring so all the plants removed from the eventual guest area were potted and placed onto of the sand so that they could get the sunlight and still drain well.

Year 0 – Arrival of the Beardless

This time I thought I would get a better handle on it so I planned for more than 300 bearded guests but the beardless area would remained the same at least for now. With a little sand and fresh soil the arriving beardless guest were placed in holes soaked in a dilute solution of bloom booster for shock, labeled and mulched for winter with just a touch of 10-10-10 fertilizer in time released pellets are placed to be watered in with snow and rain during the winter. Meanwhile the original guest bed, now emptied of my iris which were potted or placed in other beds, was given some additional dirt after the dirt around the edges were dug out and weed block placed so that this time I would not loose so much dirt when it rained. Additional sand was added and again compost would come in the spring but I placed fertilizer and lime as a pretreatment turned it in and the bed was ready for the winter.

Year 1 - Beardless in one year trying to cope, Arrival of Bearded

Spring arrives again and the beardless now gets a treatment of 5-35-10 fertilizer, weed preventer, and Merit®, goes on the bed then a top coat of compost, then all beds even the empty bearded bed is sprayed with antifungal agents to help with leaf spot. I keep an eye out for those not doing well and they get a little treatment for shock a little more. The bearded bed now has composted added along with lime since added for the compost 90 percent of the time is very acidic and the more alkaline it is for the bearded the less likely I am to get rot (soil + compost usually test at 5.8 – 6.3 before lime). The bed tilled again, each Guest is planted and labeled as it arrives and a weak solution of bloom booster is again used for shock. I make sure there is room to expand just in case there is more than the expected number of guests. Weed preventer, and Merit® are added after the first snowfall, helps with early spring, and 10-10-10 for the fall.

Year 2 – Beardless and Bearded settle

Now to care for them all so that those attending will get the best show possible especially since there is no help and I am on my own. Weed preventer, and Merit® goes on the bed a little more 5-35-10 fertilizer is added along with more lime, and the beds are sprayed against leaf spot, but this is Maryland and we expect lots of rain between March and June. June comes and the triple shredded mulch goes on only after the soil is tested and it is greater than 7.0 pH. Now more Merit®, more weed preventer, more fertilizer for the rebloomers, more work on the maze and of course the weeding.

Year 3 – Regional Year

After the same treatment of the previous year, three years after the Beardless arrive and two years after the bearded you check the beds every day for signs of rot which is quickly treated by pouring on the Listerine®, checking for spot and pulling leaves, putting last potted irises in the ground then a last run through all the bed to dead head finishing just before the buses arrives with attendees to the Regional Meeting. You can show off your garden, your new beds and seedlings in various stages of production and your buttons pop with the compliments of how well the guest look.

Now that I have scared you all with all the work it takes to have a regional tour garden you are all saying, ‘Not Me. No way!!!!’ Ah now come on. It really isn’t that bad. You are out in your garden nearly every day any way, you know you want those new beds, but there is even a better reward, most of the time the wonderful hybridizers allow you, as garden owner, to keep one of their introduced cultivars just for the pleasure of guesting them and you had years of seeing them before anyone else in the region. Come on now volunteer your gardens so we all can see, because you know there will be at least one shuttle bug that will post all their pictures on Facebook, iris-photos, Cubit, or other social network, or better yet they will send them to the AIS editor.