

Some thoughts from a New Hybridizer.

When I joined the AIS in 2001, I was truly naive as to what to expect from my joining this organization. I have always jumped in and gotten involved with whatever organization I am with whether it is work or play. My first convention was the same year in Virginia. I was able to meet many of the hybridizers across the country many whose irises I had seen for the first time that year. The more conventions I attended the more the dreaded “Iris Bug” imbedded deeper into me. Like most gardeners I have a variety of iris types but the largest numbers of those are tall bearded.

Having had some small success with the smaller varieties I decided to start on the tall bearded. There are several good articles on hybridizing,^{1,2} of which the main theme seems to have a specific goal in mind.³ Well I have never been one to get specifics, what would happen if something spectacular comes out of something I did not plan. I had to think about it more.

Without a background in botany or horticulture I was way behind the learning curve. Did this matter, well yes it did in that I chose completely unacceptable crosses that produced ..., well let us just say my compost pile was very large this year (Figure 1). I finally set goals for my self and with guidance from Dr. Don Spoon, Barry Blyth and others whose irises I admire and have had the pleasure to hear talk at one or more convention, I plan for more tall bearded crosses. As much as I love some of the older varieties, I knew that my iris plantings needed serious up dating.



1 Daughter Of Stars (Spoon 2001)

I have in the past bred and shown English Mastiffs. What I bred for was what pleased me not a show judge. What I produced were healthy, long lived animals that were not only good show dogs but were better pets. I figured that this was the best plan for my iris attempts at least as far as tall bearded were concerned. Despite my lack of enthusiasm for purples, I found that DAUGHTER OF STARS (Spoon 2001) was a good place to start. Because I liked them either at conventions or in private collections I also added, HOBO HAVEN (Maryott 1998), DECADENCE (Blyth 2004), DARK DRAMA (Keppel 2005), NEANDERTHAL (Worel 2003) WALKARA (Ames 1996) and GALACTIC WARRIOR (Hedgecock 2000) among others to start. This year I added to my collections other iris that pleased me and that I wanted to work with. With such good genes at my disposal I feel I have a fair chance of at least getting a first cross keeper to build on.

The broad spectrum in the lines I chose to work with also comes from my animal background. A true F1 generation in animals is usually the most health and vigorous.



2 Walkara (Ames 1996)

Based on this the close breeding in some tall bearded today has not turned me away from them but in my thoughts trying to keep the F1 generation improvements and still work towards a goal is what I am going to work on first. Will I ever inbreed, you bet.

Inbreeding in animal breeding, no matter the species, it is always good to know what you are dealing with. Very close inbreeding (siblings, mother X son, and father X daughter) will usually tease out the very good and the very bad. It is this second that I want to know. If there is a fatal flaw in a cross that might appear in subsequent

generations I want to know about it before it is perpetuated. Don Spoon said to me that every cross should include a sibling cross⁴ and I believe he is right. This idea would eliminate many of the fatal flaws that may not show up for generations, but can be eliminated if caught early enough in the breeding program.

For new hybridizers like me, it is imperative that we learn from the “Experts”. Though much of what is said is over my head, it is beginning to sink in. For those of us pollen dabbers that truly want to introduce an iris worth of an award, we need to learn by doing and by listening, but more importantly we need truthful expert advice on what we have achieved. It does us no good to tell us that the new child we have blooming is wonderful and beyond words when there are obvious flaws that we may not see or know about. It is essential that those who want to hybridize take judges training especially those training opportunities that are offered in gardens.

There are so many opportunities for learning within the AIS that it astounds me that more people do not take advantage of it. I am talking about the internet, mail groups, training in and out of the garden, and one on one with hybridizers and judges. To advance this flower we need to have as much information as we can squeeze out of those with the knowledge. I have been very lucky in this and new members also have access. By attending convention you open your mind to new directions, possibilities, and there I have yet to be rebuffed by any hybridizer to whom I have asked a question.

Hopefully in the years to come I will be able to put all I have learned in to that one spectacular iris seedling that blooms in my garden, performs great in other’s gardens and that is deserving of introduction.

References:

1. Seen on the internet at : <http://www.region18.com/hybridizing.htm>
2. The Gardener’s Iris Book by William Shear
3. Clarence Mahan – Personal communication
4. Dr. Donald Spoon – Personal Communication.