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USDA Zone 7



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Eastern Report *By Director Mike Locketell*

Excessive Rainfall Affects Summer Rebloom

Sound cultural practice is a necessity to obtain optimal flowering on cool season reblooming bearded irises (Zone 8 and below). Proper establishment, scheduled fertilizer applications, persistent weed control and timely division insure performance. The wild card in the equation is always the weather. Without some cooperation from Mother Nature, results can be dismal.

Central Virginia, including metro Richmond, has experienced inopportune rolling droughts in recent years. They had the bad habit of appearing in mid August and lasting through September. Supplemental watering could sometimes make a difference, but delayed rebloom would likely occur. If summer night temperatures breaking below 60°F were absent, it was even harder to evaluate results on both seedlings and named varieties in October and early November.

This year's weather brought a new extreme into view. Recorded rainfall for metro Richmond in 2017 was twenty-three inches. As summer came to a close in 2018, rain totals stood at a whopping forty-eight inches! Coupled with customary summer heat and humidity, damage was inevitable on established bearded iris clumps including rebloomers. Roots disappeared thanks to super saturated soils. Individual rhizomes could be plucked from the ground with ease. This was particularly evident at my BP Market public planting in South Richmond.

A badly needed July renovation at the site was delayed and finally cancelled. With no prolonged dry weather in sight, the iris planting suffered further decline including crickets feeding on exposed rhizomes. A bright spot was the annual component planted at the bed's edge for summer color. Lantana and annual vinca hybrids flourished with the excessive moisture. Plant size tripled to mask the reblooming iris decline. Incredibly, **Locketell TB Re Sdlg. #21231-Apricot** and **'Over And Over'** TB (*S. Innerst 2001*) produced short bloomstalks in late August with NO growing points! Amazing!

My main growing space remains at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College in Goochland County, VA. My trial beds for reblooming bearded irises and herbaceous peonies was established there in 2011 through an agreement with the Ornamental Horticulture Department. The site has an interesting microclimate favoring cool season bearded rebloomers. Summer and fall flowering results were outstanding in 2017 on both seedlings and named varieties in all classes. Thanks to the extreme weather, the same results did not materialize in 2018.

June and July saw NO rebloom activity. Typically five degrees cooler, summer night temperatures stayed above the 60°F threshold. Despite record precipitation in metro Richmond, JSRCC's western rural address along the James River diverted some rainfall in July, August and September. The drier conditions kept root systems particularly on mature tall bearded clumps intact. As August was coming to a close, emerging bloomstalks were finally detected.

Unlike 2017, only a few seedlings and named varieties saw early September flowering at JSRCC. **'Just Call Me'** TB (*B. Wilkerson 2008*) and **'July Sunshine'** TB (*G. P. Brown 1965*) led the way. The late Kentucky breeder's near blue-violet amoena has been outstanding in my garden for ten years. Prior to relocating to JSRCC, this under appreciated eastern origination has faithfully rebloomed around Labor Day each year at Cosby Farm in nearby Powhatan County.

'July Sunshine' has only been in the JSRCC lineup since a bed renovation in 2015. As the name indicates, rebloom bloomstalks have appeared in late June with flowering in early July. Judges will complain about inferior flower form, but this historic tall bearded yellow from Massachusetts has earned its place in my garden despite trying circumstances. Other TBs in bloom at summer's end were **'Coronation of David'** (*B. Miller by Niswonger 1999*), **'My Friend Jonathan'** (*B. Miller 1996*),



Over And Over TB
(*S. Innerst 2001*)



Coronation Of David TB
(*B. Miller 1999*)



Just Call Me TB
(*B. Wilkerson 2008*)



My Friend Jonathan TB
(*B. Miller 1996*)



September Buttercup BB
(G.P. Brown 1962)



Sailboat Bay SDB
(L.Zurbrigg 2001)



Baby Blessed SDB
(L. Zurbrigg 1979)



Grapelet MDB
(J.T. Aitken 1989)



Metro Blue TB
(M. Lockatell 2015)

‘Over and Over’ (S. Innerst 2001), ‘Queen Dorothy’ (E. Hall 1984). ‘September Buttercup’ BB (G.P. Brown 1962) made the median summer list as well as ‘Baby Blessed’ SDB (L. Zurbrigg 1979), one of my mentor’s signature rebloomers that reliably performs in practically any growing condition.

There was also some seedling bloom to mention. **Mitch Jameson’s SDB Re Sdlg. #B88** had open flowers in early September. The SDB parentage is Baby Blessed (L. Zurbrigg 1979) X Bright Vision (G. Shoop 1983). **Sdlg. #B88’s** bright yellow blooms have the same flower form as its famous pod parent. Even though a month late, in 2018, this Missouri origination is a consistent performer at JSRCC and BP Market. As a pollen parent coupled with SDB Re ‘Sailboat Bay’ (L. Zurbrigg 2001), **B88’s** offspring have shown interesting color combinations, good vigor and reliable fall flowering.



Forever Blue SDB
(C. Chapman 1997)



The late Betty Wilkerson sent me two seedlings to plant in the fall before her passing in 2017. One of them, **Wilkerson TB Re Sdlg. #2611-02Re** was supposed to be a yellow amoena with blue beards. Unfortunately, it grew into other seedlings from the same cross in Betty’s Scottsville, KY garden. The one now growing and blooming at JSRCC is pale blue with a darker blaze on each fall. This seedling had late October flowers in 2017, but rebloom began in mid-September this year. If it shows consistent rebloom next year, maybe a decision can be made on its future.

George Hillenbrandt from Slatington, PA has always been a willing contributor to my reports. George’s garden was a tour destination for the 2016 AIS National Convention. His plantings feature bearded rebloomers from all classes and locales. He reported late August

flowering on ‘Over And Over’ TB (S. Innerst 2001). September saw blooms on ‘Baby Blessed’ SDB (L. Zurbrigg 1979) and ‘Metro Blue’ TB (M. Lockatell 2015). George, the Guest Iris Chairperson for the upcoming New Jersey 2020 AIS Centennial National Convention also had early September flowering on **Lockatell TB Re Sdlg. #21217-02Re** (Over And Over X Metro Blue). The medium blue’s performance matched previous results at my JSRCC garden and is under serious consideration for registration.

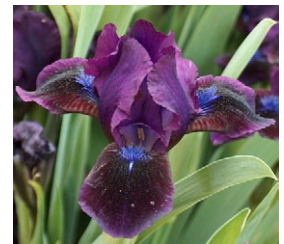
Rosemary Mead Trompeter from Darien, CT near the Long Island Sound, sent me her summer rebloom results. She observed sporadic flowering July through August on ‘Grapelet’ MDB (J.T. Aitken 1989), ‘Baby Blessed’ SDB (L. Zurbrigg 1989), ‘Forever Blue’ SDB (C. Chapman 1997) and ‘Jewel Baby’ SDB (E. Hall 1984) as well as August and September bloom on ‘Constant Companion’ IB (C. Marsh 1995) and ‘Fast Forward’ IB (J.T. Aitken 2002).

Battling challenging growing conditions throughout the year, Ruth Harding from Pittsburgh, PA experienced some summer rebloom. Early September flowering was observed on ‘Queen Dorothy’ TB (E. Hall 1984) and mid-September bloom appeared on ‘Baby Blessed’ SDB (L. Zurbrigg 1979), ‘Daughter of Stars’ TB (D. Spoon 2001) and ‘Love Goes On’ TB (D. Spoon 2004).

Despite meager summer rebloom, due to challenging weather conditions, fall flowering would save the season at my JSRCC and BP Market garden locations. There were some nice surprises to keep the juices flowing for 2019. These findings will be shared with the RIS membership in the *Recorder’s* Spring Issue. Stay tuned.



Constant Companion IB
(C. Marsh 1995)



Jewel Baby SDB
(E. Hall 1984)



Love Goes On TB
(D. Spoon 2004)

Photo Credits page 27:
September Buttercup, R. Probst
Sailboat Bay, G. Spoon
Baby Blessed, R. Shadlow
Grapelet, J.T. Aitken
Metro Blue, R. Shadlow
Constant Companion,
G. Spoon
Jewel Baby, R. Probst
Love Goes On, G. Spoon
Forever Blue (clump),
C. Chapman
Forever Blue (single),
C. Buchheim