

Double, Double Toil and Trouble: Efforts Toward the Perfect Double Louisiana Iris

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The Louisiana iris world owes a debt of gratitude to Marvin Granger for finding the only double Louisiana iris in the wild, ‘Creole Can-Can’ (Granger 56), but also for using this iris to develop a strain of very unique iris. As I began working on this group myself, I began to realize what an amazing thing Marvin had done.

‘Creole Can-Can’ was found in a swamp in Cameron Parish in 1954 on one of the collecting trips Marvin made with several fellow Louisiana iris enthusiasts of the time. Apparently it had already formed a sizeable clump and each blossom of the clump was distinctly double. Color-wise, the blossoms were similar to other *I. giganticaerulea*’s growing nearby. It is fortunate that Marvin came on this clone when he did as hurricanes in subsequent years introduced salt water into the area, destroying the wild irises in that location. (Other amazing stories of such luck are found throughout the history of Louisiana iris hybridizing.) ‘Creole Can Can’

What Marvin did was to outcross ‘Creole Can-Can’ to non-double parents and then cross the resulting seedlings with each other.

is a type of double formed from the conversion of an anther into a petaloid structure. Because the anther is normally positioned under the style tissue, these petaloids must grow from beneath the style and emerge from under the style to the surface of the blossom. In many cases this requires some contortion of the petaloid to achieve this position and also means that these extra petaloids are much less regular in form and size than the other petals. Now, the male or pollen-bearing stamens normally occur on these structures so this means that these plants can generally only be used as pod parents. Worse yet, the trait is recessive so that the first generation crosses are not doubles. What Marvin did was to outcross ‘Creole Can Can’ to non-double parents and then cross the resulting seedlings with each other. Doubles should be produced as approximately 25% of those seedlings. Singles, cartwheels (six petaled, so-called “all fall forms”), and doubles occur in a ratio of 1:2:1 in these crosses.

Despite the handicaps of working with irises which had no pollen and a recessive characteristic, Marvin produced a lovely strain of doubles from ‘Creole Can-Can.’ I have grown all of them except the pure white ‘Rokki’ (Granger 81). My two favorites are ‘Double Talk’ (Granger, 71) and ‘Instant Replay’ (Granger, 81). ‘Double Talk’ is a very dark purple and is quite consistently double as well. It is short, about twenty inches as it grows for me,



‘Creole Can-Can’

and usually only has 3 bud positions here. ‘Instant Replay’ is a lighter shade of blue, not too different from those seen in wild *I. giganticaerulea* populations. Although registered as short, this plant grows about thirty-eight inches for me in Mississippi and has up to five bud positions. The blooms are very consistently of large size and the plants are very vigorous. ‘Creole Canary’ (Granger, 1976) is the most vigorous of the group and possibly one of the most vigorous Louisiana irises ever. It is the first of Marvin’s outside the range of blue-purple as well, being a canary yellow with green influence. In addition to the petaloid stamens, ‘Creole Canary’ often produces extra petals. The styles are often pushed upward by the large structures produced from the petaloids ascending from below this tissue. Some describe this effect as messy or irregular but others find it intriguing. ‘Starlite Starbrite’ (Granger 85), a creamy white, is classified as a cartwheel, rather than a double, but for



'Rokki'

Photo from: *The Louisiana Iris* (1988)

me most of the flowers have petaloid stamens in addition to the six falls, making it a double. The same could be said of the shorter 'Rose Cartwheel' (Granger 80). Here about 50 % of the blooms have extra appendages derived from the anthers. These plants give us interested in creating more of this type a wonderful base for further crossing.

As a group, Marvin's doubles had two faults that I wanted to correct, low bud count and less ruffling than most modern cultivars. At about the time my interest in the Granger doubles was kindled, several cartwheel and double Louisiana irises from the Taylor lines appeared on the market. These were less consistently double than the Granger plants, but they had large flowers on very well branched stalks and very ruffled flowers. The doubling was produced by the increase in the number of true petals rather than the conversion of anthers onto petaloids. Because the doubling didn't affect the anthers, they had pollen. Crosses could be made directly with the Granger doubles without going through an intermediary outcross. 'Real Treasure'

(Taylor 93), 'Gatecrasher' (Taylor 91), and 'Surprise Offer' (Taylor 91) were all used in crosses with the Granger material. The most interesting flowers came out of the 'Gatecrasher' matings. 'Gatecrasher' tends to give very vigorous seedlings too. From 'Rose Cartwheel' X 'Gatecrasher,' all of the seedlings were a beautiful clear rose-purple to red and every seedling a perfect cartwheel type. My favorite of these is a clear mulberry rose with dagger-like signals on all parts. Although these seedlings were short, like 'Rose Cartwheel' or slightly taller, all had at least three (and many four) bud positions as well. From 'Double Talk' X 'Gatecrasher' came two of the most striking seedlings. Both are tall dark blue purple cartwheels with five-to-six bud positions, but the signal patterns are quite distinct. One has a small sort of netted signal on a dark purple, ruffled blossom. The other has a very distinct cream dagger signal of cream on a dark purple petal with lighter rims to all the petals. It wears the garden name "Cloak and

Dagger" because of the dagger-shaped signal and overall dark color to the blossom. Unfortunately, that name has already been taken for a Japanese iris in the 1950's. Your suggestions for another name are welcome.

Because cartwheels but no doubles were obtained in the Granger X Taylor double crossings, it is likely that the doubling in the two lines is due to different genetic *loci*. This spring I succeeded in crossing the seedlings back to both parental types and also intercrossing these cartwheel seedlings of mine, hoping to recover seedlings with the genes for both Taylor and Granger-type doubling in one flower. The mind boggles at what an iris with both petaloid anthers and extra true petals would be like. It will be difficult to wait until 2005 to see that group of seedlings.

Although some in the society have scoffed at doubles, I find the cartwheel seedlings are some of the most well received in my numerous slide shows. Thus, I think there is both interest and appreciation for this relatively small but growing group of Louisiana iris hybrids. Come join the fun!



'Double Talk'

Photo from: *The Louisiana Iris* (1988)