

In 2001, the SLI buses arrived at Jeff Weeks' Garden well before bloom. They should have waited a bit.



Tour Garden Revisited

BY PATRICK O'CONNOR

Jeff Week's garden was frustrating for everyone on the 2001 bus tour at the SLI Convention. So close, but still a few warm days away from good bloom.

Undoubtedly, the greatest frustration was Jeff's, since so much work had gone into preparing for visitors to his garden near Denham Springs, Louisiana, a few short miles down the interstate east of Baton Rouge. Everything was manicured and ready, but not many flowers had decided to pop out, except for a few

species, notably some early fulvas. There was a fine display of scapes that said, "You should see this place in another week."

Clearly, a revisit the next season was called for. Spring 2002 offered a fine opportunity to rub it in and let everyone know what they missed.

Ready and Waiting

It was a lot. Jeff's garden in 2002 still looked like it was waiting for a tour bus. Neat and well landscaped. The new pond was a year older and more mature, a perfect setting for the tall *I. giganticaeruleas* in the water, with *I. fulva*

and *I. nelsonii* higher up. Some forms of *nelsonii* were displayed in large tubs, as well.

The species are not typically seen in tour gardens, which tend to emphasize recent cultivars. Jeff has a strong interest in them and in older cultivars. He has assembled at least a half-dozen forms of *nelsonii* and a number of fulvas. His *giganticaeruleas* include a collected rose pink and the white 'Barbara Elaine Taylor' as well as clones in shades of blue and lavender.

Jeff's own rescued fulva 'Bayou Bandit' was in full bloom. Most distinc-



tive and very attractive in a garden setting.

Jeff's nelsonii's include the red forms, but also a yellow and a distinctive magenta-rose. The yellow was a surprise. It did not tend toward the mustard yellow that I associate with that color in the nelsonii's, but rather it was a clean, light sulphur yellow not unlike many recent cultivars. One cannot help wonder still at what sorts of combinations abounded southeast of Abbeville where all these things were collected. True species? Natural hybrids? Certainly you can't tell by looking at an individual plant.

Oldies

One wonders why we do not see more of the older cultivars of Louisiana iris. I suppose the old makes way for the new, and there have been improvements in substance and form and the development of new features such as ruffling and edging. But some of the older ones are beauties, and to see them is to

Opposite page, from lower left: Marvin Granger's indescribable 'Creole Can-Can'; Frank Chowning's rusty orange 'Tarnished Brass'; and Granger's 'Double Talk'.

From top right: Sidney Conger's gorgeous rose and cream 'Dr. Domon'; Jeff Weeks' found iris 'Bayou Bandit'; Ike Nelson's 'Plum Good', recently registered by Barbara Nelson with the help of Jeff Weeks; Owen Kimbrough's 'LSU Beauty'. **Middle Top:** a nice *I. giganteaerulea*; the white form of *I. giganteaerulea* named 'Barbara Elaine Taylor'; and a rose-magenta form of *I. nelsonii*. **Lower left:** a nice yellow *I. nelsonii*.

want them back. Sidney Conger's 'Dr. Dormon', registered thirty years ago, is gorgeous. In Jeff's garden, it stood out. Rose pink with a huge thumbprint signal patch of creamy white interlaced with rose veins and a thick yellow line signal. The very dark rose styles present a beautiful contrast to the white signal area.

In the interest of full disclosure, it should be noted that Conger described 'Dr. Dormon' as having "wild orchid" standards, "dahlia mauve" falls, and a signal patch that "blends from cloud amber to deep amber." I stand corrected.

One real oldie that Jeff grows is the newly registered 'Plum Good'. This Ike Nelson iris has been in commerce for years, at least since the early '50s, but it was never actually registered. Interestingly, it received an HC award in 1950.





In 2001, Barbara Nelson, with the help and encouragement of Jeff Weeks, remedied the missing registration. Perhaps with new credentials, gardeners will rediscover this rich, plum red iris. A luscious color set off by very large yellow lance signals. A most handsome garden plant.

More Oldies

How frequently does Frank Chowning’s 1961 ‘Tarnished Brass’ make a convention appearance? Or Kimbrough’s ‘LSU Beauty’, registered in 1959? Not often, but they are worth seeing. The form of ‘Tarnished Brass’ is decidedly a throwback, but I am not sure the orange color (Chowning said “henna”) has been surpassed yet.

‘LSU Beauty’ is a pink shade with deep rose outlining of the yellow lance signals. It is a product of a collected yellow, ‘Young’s Coulee Yellow’, and the magenta nelsonii type collected by W. B. MacMillan and registered as ‘Peggy Mac’ in 1943. Those were the good old days.

MacMillan’s ‘Mac’s Blue Heaven’ is not so rare, but it is still a gorgeous garden plant with white styles against the

blue of the petals. It has monster rhizomes, so give it space if you decide to reintroduce it to your garden as I have.

Jeff is always looking for older Louisianas to grow and preserve. And he welcomes trades.

Newbies

Jeff does not ignore the newer cultivars even if his plantings have an “historic” cast. Joe Mertzweiler’s ‘Creole Rhapsody’ was there and looking fine, for example.

Several other irises of note were modern in form, even if not hot out of the latest *Registrations and Introductions*. Army’s ‘Easter Tide’ and Raabe’s ‘Gerry Marsteller’ both were impressive. One iris, probably ‘Harland K. Riley’ was

nice, although the veining in my picture was not as pronounced as in my memory. The green cast to styles points to Harland K, however.

Back to the Future

Sadly, with the SLI Convention rotating around the country now, it might be a few years before Jeff Weeks’ garden is on tour again. But Jeff does open his place one weekend each season to friends and acquaintances so the tour does not have to be official.

Iris aficionados within driving distance of Baton Rouge should take a trip some season to see what’s old. And there’s plenty of new, too, more all the time. A beautiful, fun garden that vividly illustrates the history of the Louisiana iris.



Jeff Weeks’ main planting, in a low, mucky area layed out with pallet walkways and barrel-lid stepping “stones.”



Opposite page, top from left: *Mertzweiller's 'Creole Rhapsody'*; *Arny's 'Easter Tide'*; *Raabe's 'Gerry Marsteller'*; *Below: unknown, possibly 'Harland K. Riley'*.

Above: *A large clump of a vigorous purple seedling; two pretty lavender blossoms of I. virginica.*

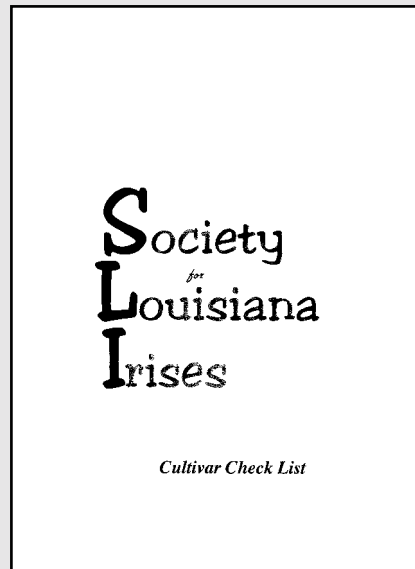
Article on SLI Website

This article on Jeff Weeks' Garden, including the pictures in color, may be viewed on the SLI Website.

www.louisianas.org

New Check List Now Available!

Thanks to the work of Harry Wolford of Palm Bay, FL, the *SLI Cultivar Check List* has been updated to cover the earliest Louisiana iris cultivars (pre-1930) through the registrations for 2000. The *Check List* is in an 8 1/2 by 11 format with holes punched for a three ring binder and set-up to slip in the Registrations & Introductions for subsequent years.



The **Check List** is organized by year and indexed by cultivar name and hybridizer. For each iris, complete registration information is given, including hybridizer, year of registration/introduction, color, height, bloom time, parentage, and a description of the flower.

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