



Background

Bryan Dodsworth started hybridising Tall Bearded Irises in his Nottinghamshire Rectory garden in the late 1960s, and following his early retirement in the mid 1970s, spent the next thirty five years developing a unique range of irises. During this period he produced over 100,000 seedlings and registered less than fifty varieties that met his rigorous selection criteria. Bryan is the creator of the Quintessential Modern British Iris, clear coloured, well proportioned and lightly ruffled blooms, supported on majestic, elegant and perfectly balanced stems, yet strong enough to withstand the Nottinghamshire wind and rain. With twelve Dykes Medals to his name (the Oscar of the Iris hybridising world) he is without doubt the most successful British hybridiser in the ninety-year history of the British Iris Society. Bryan's focus from the outset was clear and uncompromising: he wanted to create a plant that would meet the demands of the show bench and would perform well in the garden. Structure and form were primary considerations, and these were more important than colour which is the current market obsession today. Here Bryan's



Collaboration

In 1989 Barry Emmerson contacted Bryan following a Gardeners' World Broadcast on Tall Bearded Irises in which Bryan featured prominently; Bryan then mentored Barry for the next twenty years. Following Bryan's death in 2009 Barry Emmerson, current British Iris Society President and Leiston resident, offered to help Bryan's son Simon, from North Walsham in Norfolk, with his father's iris collection. Simon knew his father's irises were important, but had no idea how significant they were in the context of 20th-century British Iris hybridising. Nearly four years later this new collaboration resulted in the creation of the English Iris Company (EIC), a venture set up by Barry and Simon to champion British Irises.

British Irises

Interest in British Tall Bearded Irises has all but disappeared in the last twenty years. Cheaper foreign travel and availability through the Internet has encouraged many customers to buy from abroad, with the majority of UK Retailers buying almost exclusively from the United States or from Europe. Commercial pressure and the premium value of something new/different each year has seen a lowering of the quality of many recent introductions to the UK market. Digitally enhanced images of fantastically coloured and patterned blooms, some with spectacular appendages to the beards, are produced to seduce the customer. However, so often the living plant disappoints. In recent years the focus of many hybridisers has been to develop new colours and flower shapes, with scant attention paid to the style and structure of the plant on which the flowers are carried. This can and does cause real difficulty with many modern introductions. To complicate things further, there is a bewildering choice of Tall Bearded Irises on the market today, with some

catalogues containing many hundreds of individual varieties, with a wide colour range. However, a quick scan on line does not make easy reading, and fails often to provide the essential information to make an informed choice. EIC is working with Barry and is introducing modern British Irises with the style and structure of the Dodsworth strain, crossed with exciting new American colour lines to create a Contemporary Collection. The English Iris Company exhibited at Chelsea in 2014 for the first time. A successful Press Day in June 2014 has attracted further interest from both local and national media.

The English Iris Company's focus on British Irises is a deliberate attempt to redress the balance and celebrate some of the best introductions over the last fifty years in the knowledge that they are hand picked by experts, the 'best of the crop', and tried and tested in British conditions. These irises are as fresh and vibrant today as ever. Irises can still be purchased in 2014 for delivery in late August /early September, but with limited availability, to avoid disappointment please don't delay.

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Red Pike © Marianne Majeurus
 Above: Blaeberry Pie © EIC.

Championing British Irises in Norfolk and Suffolk

Iris, the goddess of the rainbow gave her name to a genus of flowers that are characterised by their amazing colour range. What is less commonly known is that irises come in many different shapes and forms, and originate from different parts of the world from the Caucasus in the East to the pacific coast of the United States, and then westwards into Europe. These different varieties, both species and hybrids, flower at various points

throughout the year. This article charts the progress of a new venture based in Norfolk set up to promote British Tall Bearded Irises which flower in the UK from mid May to mid June. This limited flowering season is what makes the iris one of the most spectacular and prized flowers in the garden. They are also remarkably easy to grow given the right conditions and are tolerant of extremes of heat and cold, making them an ideal plant for your garden.

choice was for single, clean, clear colours that allowed the flower to be viewed as an entity, and viewed from a distance. Compare and contrast with the modern colour mixes which look exciting close up, but viewed from afar are often blurred and muddy!