

The plantsmen

BUCKSHAW GARDENS

HOLWELL, SHERBORNE, DORSET



ONCOCYCLUS, REGELIA
& REGELIO-CYCLUS IRISES

ONCOCYCLUS, REGELIA & REGELIO-CYCLUS IRISES

Our current catalogue should be referred to for the availability and prices of the irises included in this list. The rhizomes we supply are grown and propagated by us in England and will be despatched when dormant between August and November. We prefer to receive orders before midsummer, however, as we do not lift plants after our stocks have been started into growth. Hand-pollinated seeds of several are normally available and those interested should ask for our seed list, issued annually in winter.

THE ONCOCYCLUS IRISES. The distribution of these irises in nature extends roughly in an arc from the Sinai Peninsula north to Turkey and the S. Caucasus and then south and east through Iran. In N.W. Iran, Turkey and the Caucasus, they are adapted to a climate with extremes of temperature and low precipitation: very hot, dry summers and very cold, dry winters, when there is a heavy snow-covering, which provides their main source of moisture when it melts in spring. They usually grow on open, west- or north-facing hillsides between 1,000 m. and 3,000 m. (3,000 – 10,000 ft.) among other steppe-vegetation – low shrubby plants, like Thymes and Acantholimon, annuals and bulbs. In Israel, the Lebanon, Jordan & Syria, other *Oncocyclus* Irises grow. Some inhabit similar situations, as in the Anti-Lebanon, though, there, where the climate is less severe, they may grow among scrub. Others from Sinai and the western edges of the Syrian Desert are almost desert plants. In Britain, they flower towards the end of April and in May. Their flowers are among the most spectacular and beautiful of all plants. Generally, the Eastern, steppe species are dwarfer with smaller, narrower leaves and more refined, no less sumptuous, flowers than their Western cousins.

I. ATROPURPUREA. Israel. Large flowers of immaculate, lustrous, violet-black satin. Dense, yellow beard. Grassy, falcate leaves. From poor, sandy soils in nature. 22 cm.

I. DEMAVENDICA (JCA 2393). Elburz Mts., N. Iran. Large, elegant flowers of violet silk with a sparse, grey-white beard. A fairly strong-growing species, rather tending towards the *Regelias*. 30 cm.

I. ELEGANTISSIMA (*I. iberica* subsp. *elegantissima*) (JCA 3263). E. Turkey. Enormous flowers sit almost on the ground. Falls densely veined and speckled with dark maroon contrast vividly with ivory-white standards. Short, sickle-shaped foliage. Flowers about 14 cm. high. Breathtaking! 20 cm.

I. GATESII. S. Turkey. The largest *Oncocyclus* Iris. Huge flowers, around 20 cm. high, of creamy white, thinly veined and delicately spotted all over with purple to give a pearl-grey appearance. Tall, broad foliage. 60 cm.

I. HAYNEI. N. Israel. Exceptionally rare with enormous, ruffled standards, veined with purple on a whitish ground. Falls even more densely marked to appear violet-purple, almost black in the throat. Robust leaves. 30 cm.

I. HELENA (JCA 3163) (previously listed as *I. acutiloba*). Kurdistan. Exquisitely graceful, pointed, chalk-white flowers, sparsely veined with maroon. Small, neat, round signal-patch. Narrow, grassy leaves. 15 cm. (Illustration on cover).

I. IBERICA. In 1966, a number of irises were collected over a distance of 60 miles, near the borders of Turkey and the U.S.S.R. in Persian Azerbaijan. These exhibit an enormous and bewildering range of variation and would appear to be hybrids or intermediates between *I. iberica* and *I. lycotis*. Some can be placed close to *I. elegantissima* but are very distinct in general appearance from the E. Turkish form we offer above. As no two clones are identical, though the general characters vary from colony to colony, we retain them under their original collection numbers and list all together under *I. lycotis*. These are among the most spectacular of Irises with huge flowers, intricately veined and speckled with varying shades of maroon on a silvery white ground. All are sumptuous.

I. LORTETII. N. Israel, S. Lebanon. Robust growth and enormous flowers. White standards veined with pale violet. Cream falls dotted with crimson. A beautiful, delicate, overall pink effect. 40 cm.

I. LUPINA (*I. sari* of gardens) (**M & T 4181**). Central Turkey. A robust plant with broad, falcate foliage. Coarse, brownish patterns overlie the yellowish colour of the crimped standards and falls. Fluffy, creamy beard and purple-brown signal-patch on the narrow, pinched-in falls. 35 cm.

I. LYCOTIS. See notes under *I. Iberica*.

I. AFF. LYCOTIS JCA 2066. From the Iran/Iraq border hills. Very distinct and similar to the more Western species in growth. Very large, maroon-veined flowers. Possibly a distinct, unnamed species. Rather temperamental in cultivation. 30 cm.

I. AFF. LYCOTIS JCA 2238 (& JCA 3210). Dwarfier and possibly closest to the Caucasian type of *I. lycotis*. 20 cm.

I. AFF. LYCOTIS JCA 2240; JCA 2241 (& 3212); JCA 2242; JCA 2246; JCA 2247. Plants from these five colonies exhibit the enormous intergrading variation described under *I. iberica*. It can be assumed that any irises offered under these numbers will be very variable in markings but will be spectacular in the extreme.

I. MARIAE. S. Israel, Sinai. Dark, satiny, reddish-violet flowers with rather small, tucked-in falls and purple beards. Sparse, narrow foliage from large, thick rhizomes. From sandy soils and silts. Not unlike *I. polakii* in flower. 12 cm.

I. NAZARENA. N. Israel. An extraordinary plant with creeping rhizomes and broad, curving leaves. Chalk-white standards with pale, bluish veins. Creamy-white falls densely dotted with maroon-brown. From heavy, limestone clays in nature. Very rare and rather difficult. 30 cm.

I. PARADOXA VAR. CHOSCHAB. (*I. medwedewii*) (**JCA 2234**). Azerbaijan. Enormous, white, lilac-veined standards and small, stiff falls, intricately marked and clothed in dense, black velvet. Short, falcate leaves. A good grower from fine, silty soils. 25 cm.

I. POLAKII (**JCA 2248**). Azerbaijan. Rich reddish violet, satin-textured flowers. Black signal-patch and striking black-velvet beard. Narrow, falcate leaves. An exquisite species. 20 cm.

I. POLAKII (**JCA 2233**). From a different locality and generally tending to more metallic purple shades. 20 cm.

I. POLAKII (**JCA 2236**). From a colony growing along with *I. paradoxa choschab* and containing some possible hybrids between the two.

I. SAMARIAE. N. Israel. Very close to *I. lortetii* but with even larger flowers and less reflexed falls. Standards almost pure white. Falls densely speckled with crimson spots to give a rich pink effect. Strong, broad foliage. 25 cm.

I. SARI. As the plants in cultivation under this name do not agree with the original description, we list this under the later name, *I. lupina*, until some authoritative botanical work is done on these plants.

I. SUSIANA. A magnificent, sombre iris with enormous flowers, densely dotted and veined with purple-black on a white ground. It belongs to the *I. basaltica*-*I. sofarana* group from the Lebanon. In cultivation, since 1573, all stocks are virus-infected, though it grows and flowers well and easily – see note under 'Hygiene'. 30 cm.

I. URMIENSIS (JCA 3188). Lake Rezaieyeh area, Iran. Entirely of soft, clear yellow and an indescribable, crystalline texture. Many consider it the most beautiful of all irises. From gritty, granite clays in nature, it likes to be started into growth quite early in autumn. Usually a good grower. 15 - 20 cm.

I. SPECIES JCA 2101. Persian Kurdistan. The most delightful dwarf iris from the Kurdish steppes. the ground colour varies from soft violets and grey-mauves to buff and mushroom shades but all have distinctive, chestnut-brown signal-patches surrounded by white zones below striking, dense, black-velvet beards. 15 cm.

THE REGELIA IRISES. The range of these irises begins where that of the *Oncocyclus* Section ends, in N.E. Iran, but their main distribution is in Afghanistan and Soviet Central Asia. They differ most obviously from the *Oncocyclus* in having two or more flowers to a stem, whereas the latter carry only one. The two groups are, however, extremely close and, while the *Regelias* are generally much less spectacular, they are much easier to grow and comparatively trouble-free if kept dry in summer.

I. ARENARIA. Botanically classified as a *Regelia*, this little iris does not require the conditions of the rest we offer and will be listed separately in our catalogues, when available.

I. HOOGIANA. Tadzhikistan. Pure mauve-blue flowers of exquisite shape with orange-gold beards. One of the most aristocratic of irises and the easiest of its section. 60 cm.

I. HOOGIANA 'BRONZE BEAUTY'. A delicately coloured hybrid with palest violet standards and deep violet falls, both shaded around the margins with light brown. 60 cm.

I. HOOGIANA 'PURPUREA'. A deep violet-purple version with rather smaller flowers. 40 cm.

I. KOROLKOWII. N. Afghanistan to the Tien-Shan. Elegant, pointed, white flowers with delicate, clean veins of dark chocolate brown. 45 cm.

I. KOROLKOWII 'VIOLACEA'. Deep purple veined form. 45 cm.

I. 'LUCIA'. A beautiful ruby-crimson hybrid of elegant shape with a steel-blue beard. 50 cm.

I. STOLONIFERA. Tadzhikistan. Exceptionally delicate blending of colours and veining. Pale mauve standards, edged with cinnamon brown. Chocolate brown falls shading to reddish violet in the centres. A variable plant in nature. 60 cm.

I. STOLONIFERA 'LEICHTLINII'. A more definite brown form. 60 cm.

I. STOLONIFERA 'COMPACTA' (*I. vaga compacta*). A dwarf, soft blue and brown form. Steel-blue beard. 25 cm.

I. STOLONIFERA 'ZWANENBURG BEAUTY'. A delicately coloured selection with very frilled flowers. Pale blue shaded with violet and bronze. 50 cm.

I. 'VERA'. A lovely hybrid with chocolate flowers shot with crimson and purple and with an azure beard. 40 cm.

THE REGELIO-CYCLUS HYBRIDS. While they are less distinguished and spectacular than the *Oncocyclus* Irises, these hybrids between the two sections combine the robust elegance and ease of cultivation of the seed-parents, the *Regelias*, with a good measure of the magnificence of the pollen-parents, the *Oncocycli*. The crosses which we list were originally made in Holland around the turn of this century. Most of the original hybrids are no longer available but we list a very comprehensive collection of those that are still in cultivation. We should always be glad to hear from anyone growing any which are not mentioned in this list.

'ANCILLA'. Free-flowering and of beautiful shape. Palest ice-blue, netted with violet-purple veins. An excellent hybrid. 25 cm.

'ANDROMACHE'. Signal-patch, veins and speckles of wine-red on a pearl-grey ground. 55 cm.

'ARTEMIS'. An *Oncogelia* with *I. korolkowii* as the pollen parent. Elegant flowers with soft-violet veins on a white background. 50 cm.

'CAMILLA'. *I. korolkowii* X *I. paradoxa*, with the distinct shape of the latter. Beautiful, blue-violet standards. Horizontal falls densely veined with purple-violet. Black signal-patch. 50 cm.

'CHIONE'. Palest mauve standards, very thinly veined with red-violet. Palest yellow falls, peppered and veined with crimson-brown. Bold, rounded, crimson-black velvet signal-patch. Free-flowering and almost as sumptuous as an *Oncocyclus*. 35 cm.

'CLARA'. Enormous, rounded flowers with maroon-black netted falls and whitish standards veined with purple-black. Black signal-patch. Rather similar to *I. susiana* and preferable to it. 50 cm.

'CLOTHO'. An *I. paradoxa* hybrid influenced by its distinct shape. Violet-blue standards and black-purple falls with dense, maroon-black beards. 45 cm.

'DARDANUS'. *I. korolkowii* X *I. iberica*. Cream-white falls with dusky purple veins and signal-patch. Standards shaded and veined with lilac-purple. A robust, large-flowered hybrid. 50 cm.

'ELVIRA'. Pale violet-purple standards and cream falls, veined with maroon-brown. Small, brownish signal-patch. 45 cm.

'ISIS'. Ivory falls, veined and speckled with dark maroon. Diluted wine-red standards diffusely veined with maroon. Good shape. 45 cm.

'MERCURIUS'. A superlative hybrid of *I. polakii*. Huge, rounded flowers of rich, bronzy, violet-purple of distinguished shape. 55 cm.

'SYLPHIDE'. A magnificent plant, showing little if any *Regelia*-influence. Enormous flowers delicately speckled and veined give an overall effect of soft brown-grey. Striking dark signal-patch. Altogether rather suggestive of *I. gatesii*. Vigorous. 50 cm.

'TEUCROS'. Pale crimson standards, veined and shaded with violet. Falls densely lined and speckled with dark maroon-violet. 45 cm.

'THESEUS'. Violet standards darkly veined and ivory falls, veined and blotched with dark violet-purple. Free-flowering. 45 cm.

'THOR'. *I. korolkowii* X *I. lupina*, with the distinct shape and pinched in falls of the latter. Sombre flowers of grey-white, densely veined with purple. Red-violet signal-patch. A smaller flower than some but very easy, vigorous and free-flowering. 30 cm.

CULTIVATION

We can do no more than give a brief indication of cultural requirements. Gardens vary so much and there is always such a diversity of opinion among gardeners that it is inadvisable to be dogmatic. We particularly recommend the article in 'The Iris Year Book 1967'. The author, Mr. Kenneth Bastow is one of the leading British growers and we were much indebted to him for invaluable advice when we started to grow a collection of these irises. 'The Book of the Iris' by R. I. Lynch (1904) gives exceptionally complete accounts of methods used around the turn of this century when these irises were widely grown. If you have not grown any before, start with the *Regelias* and *Regelio-cyclus* Hybrids. These are very easily grown under glass as long as the correct cycle of watering is observed. Although the *Oncocyclus* are surrounded by an aura of difficulty, they are much easier to grow and need much less attention than many of the alpine-house plants we offer.

CULTIVATION IN FRAMES. In moist, temperate climates, like that of Britain, these irises must be grown under glass to protect them from excess moisture and to ensure a thorough ripening of the rhizomes in summer. While there are records of their successful cultivation in the open ground for periods, this cannot be regarded as permanently satisfactory. As they grow much better if disturbed only when necessary (replanting every three years is recommended) lifting and drying off each summer does not give the best results. We grow our stocks planted out in a raised bed in a Dutch-light house but, for a small collection, a frame would generally be used. The main fault of most frames is dripping water from leaks or condensation; all available frames share this fault but it is more prevalent in some than others! Possibly the best type available at present is the 'Pluie' frame, such as is used on the bulb-frames at Wisley. Their height and the amount of light they admit are great advantages but many other types of structure — 3' x 4' wooden frames, Dutch-light frames, corrugated, sheet PVC, etc. — are used by experienced growers with great success. The normal arrangement is to place the frame on one or two feet high walls (old railway sleepers can be used). In the space between the walls, place a layer of drainage material, covered with garden compost or spent mushroom compost (rotted cow manure is ideal, if obtainable) and then 18 in. or so of a mixture of about half loam (or your garden soil) and half coarse, sharp grit (proportions varying as to the nature of the loam used). The top few inches should have extra grit forked in. The rhizomes are planted on this and covered with over an inch of the grit or

fine chippings. Extra grit can be used for species from drier areas. Lime is perhaps less important than used to be thought. If your soil is acid, a dressing of lime to bring it up to the neutral mark might be desirable. Our soil is a neutral clay but our water supply is chalky and this would seem to be sufficient. Many growers attach great importance to their use of dolomite chalk.

CULTIVATION IN POTS. We have little experience of growing these irises in pots but it can be done most successfully and, for anyone starting off with a few rhizomes, it is probably a necessity. Alpine-house conditions, when in growth, are ideal. 'Long tom' pots to give as much depth as possible should be used. Over normal drainage material, a compost of 1 part peat or leafsoil, 2 parts loam (or garden soil) and 3 parts coarse grit would be suitable. Place the rhizomes on this and surround with a surfacing of about one inch of the grit or chippings. Repotting at least every two years, removing all the old soil, would be advisable and regular feeding essential while in growth. Watering should always be around the edge of the pot and not over the rhizome.

WATERING. This is the most important aspect of growing these plants and only personal experience can prove what is best under your conditions. The rhizomes should be started into growth in October. If in frames, the lights are removed to allow rain to thoroughly moisten the soil. This should keep the plants sufficiently moist for the remainder of the winter but, if necessary, water can be carefully given between the rhizomes (never over them), during a sunny, dry period of weather. Frame-lights can be removed or water given liberally when the weather warms and growth quickens around March; lights should be replaced if rain is excessive. When the plants show signs of going dormant, water is decreased and the frames closed down and dried off (around mid-June to early July with us) until they are opened again in October.

VENTILATION. This is of great importance in preventing disease. During growth, as much air as possible should be admitted, except during driving rain. The first sign of inadequate ventilation is mildew on the leaves. Frost will not injure the dwarf, steppe species or *Regelias* but it can harm the larger, Western *Oncocyclus*, if they have made too much leaf growth in early winter.

FEEDING. As the soil advised is poor and these plants must make much growth in a very short space of time, feeding is essential. We use the two mixtures recommended to us by Mr. Bastow: in early spring, when new growth starts, 1 part calcium nitrate and 1 part ammonia nitrate at 1 oz. to the square yard; before flowering, 3 parts potassium nitrate, 2 parts superphosphate and 1 part magnesium sulphate at 4 oz. to the square yard. Both mixtures should be dissolved in water and distributed carefully between the plants from a can without a rose, keeping the mixture stirred. When replanting, we give a dusting of John Innes Base fertiliser and bonemeal to the bed. If watering is necessary in late spring, a liquid fertiliser, such as 'Maxicrop', 'Compure K' or 'Bio', can be added to the water.

HYGIENE. The main causes of losses are moulds and rots caused by our moist climate. Efficient management of watering and ventilation, complete cleanliness around the plants and avoidance of slug-damage are the best preventives. 'Captan' dust can be used to help to stop the spread of mildews and grey-moulds. Aphids are the main insect-pest and plants must be kept free from them. A modern systemic insecticide can easily accomplish this. We find Metasystox aerosols (manufactured by Baywood) extremely effective and long-lasting, if used regularly once a month when there is leaf-growth. The imperceptible mist from an aerosol does not wet the foliage and aerosols are a comparatively safe means of handling dangerous substances. Iris susiana or other virus-infected material should only be admitted if the grower is prepared to maintain scrupulous measures to prevent spread of the virus. Aphids must be completely eliminated and separate knives used when tidying or dividing such plants.

RAISING FROM SEED. All these irises germinate irregularly. Seedlings are easily handled, however, and usually flower in 3 - 4 years from germination. We sow in a very gritty compost, press the seeds into it and cover with over ½ inch of coarse grit. Seedlings can be transplanted when they have two or three leaves and kept growing for the first summer (alpine-house conditions). Thereafter, the same treatment as for mature rhizomes can be given. Ungerminated seed should be resown and retained as long as it is firm.

THE REGELIA AND REGELIO-CYCLUS IRISES. These notes on cultivation deal with the Oncocyclus Irises. It can be taken that the Regelias and their hybrids require exactly the same treatment but that they are much more easily grown with less attention to detail. In fact, several, such as *I. hoogiana*, can be very successfully grown outside if planted in a hot, dry site and covered with a cloche when dormant. Most can be easily grown in any good soil in a cold greenhouse border, if the correct watering cycle is observed. They generally start into growth later than the Oncocyclus and need not be watered until November. All will, however, handsomely repay Oncocyclus-treatment.

FIELD-NOTES regarding the original collections of Oncocyclus Irises made in Iran by J. C. Archibald in 1966 can be supplied at 5/- (.25p) per copy. These are duplicated extracts from the field-notes of this expedition and deal with all collections of the genus Iris made during this journey.