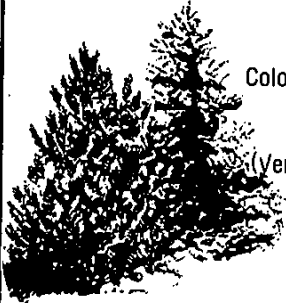


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Love in bloom

First it was rose; then lily now iris;

By SUSAN ROGERS

"Nothing can touch them for sheer elegance," says William (Bill) Simon of Westland. His eyes shine as he speaks of his favorite subject: the iris.

The tall, stately flowers that bloom in nearly every color of the rainbow (even their name means rainbow) constitute most of Simon's yard. The rest of the yard contains Simon's other love, the daylily or hemerocallis.

Simon, who began seriously breeding irises and daylilies when he retired several years ago, began growing irises 30 years ago, and daylilies several years after that.

"It's very hard work," he said. "I do it out of sheer love for the flowers — the reward is so great."

SIMON IS REPUTED to have one of the finest collections of daylilies in the area. And his iris garden — with its more than 300 varieties — has drawn nationwide attention.

There is little grass in the Simon yard. His many irregular shaped beds of irises and daylilies take up most of the area. He even has a plot of land across the street from his home where he plants the seedlings he gets after crossing the different varieties.

In late May til mid-July, Simon's "yard" literally lights up with color. From the brightest purples and blues and pinks of the irises, to the delicate yellows, pinks and oranges of the daylilies, it is a vast sea of color.

THE RATHER SHORT blooming season of the iris is followed by the more lengthy blooming season of the daylily after a period of about two weeks. Simon doesn't mind that so much time and work goes into just a few short weeks of glory.

"When the season is over, I'm ready to hang it up," he said.

Although irises and daylilies really don't have anything in common, Simon said, a great many iris growers also grow daylilies.

"They're compatible because of the growing seasons. The daylilies give your garden one more shot at blooming before fall.

YOU COULD SAY Simon grew up with a green thumb. His parents ran a greenhouse when he was a boy, and he became familiar with the ways of the grower.

At age 25, he took the sweepstakes prize at the Detroit Rose Show. His first love was roses before the tall, beautiful irises caught his eye.

Hybridizing began to take a great deal of Simon's time when he retired. Two of his iris creations were selected by judges for a "H.C." — high commendation, which means they are worthy of introduction to the American Iris Society, Simon explained.

Simon feels great strides have been made in the breeding of irises over the years. He said they are far superior to the irises of 25 years ago, and they keep getting better.

"The petals are wider now. We

have ruffling of the petals and there are far many more colors. Twenty-five years ago there were pink shades in irises."

IRISES, WHICH ARE best at a height of about 30 inches, said Simon, do not have a true red shade now. Iris growers also are currently striving for a white iris with a blue beard (the fuzzy part inside the petals)

Growers also try for good branching and substance in the flowers. Branching refers to how well the plant displays or holds its bloom and substance is how hardy the actual bloom is.

The daylily, which has multiple buds on three-foot-18-inch stems, have long slender leaves similar to a spider plant. The beautiful delicate blooms only last one day, hence the name. But there are more blooms standing by to take its place each day.

Simon said great strides are being made in daylilies today because more time and effort is being put into them. There are currently no true whites or blues in daylilies, characteristics growers are striving for.

Simon's ultimate goal is to develop a variety of iris or daylily that could be marketed.

"Then I could say I was the one who did it. Growing these flowers is more than a hobby," he said. "Only my family is more important than my flowers. I even dream about them at night."



Bill Simon checks catalogue as a new growing season begins (Staff photo by Bob Woodring)