

Keep Family In Hot Water

The average family's water-using equipment has just about doubled in the last 10 years, according to the Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Information Bureau. And that same family uses nearly twice as much hot water during the summer months as it does the rest of the year. This places an extra-heavy burden on your water heater, the bureau points out.

If you're constantly running out of hot water, you probably need a bigger capacity tank or a heater with a faster "recovery rate". (That means the heater replenishes its hot water supply faster.)

Garden Reminders

Leave bulb foliage to mature and replenish the food in the bulb for next year's blooms. . . . House plants benefit from a summer vacation on a porch or in a shaded part of the yard. . . . Dial 728-8000 for a two minute recorded message on garden problems. This 24-hour a day service is provided by the cooperative extension service. . . . Leaf miners attack birch, hawthorn and other plants, tunneling into the leaves. Systemics are effective to control them, or spray with malathion.

Suburban Gardener

The Iris Are Blooming In Ruth Esper's Garden

By BETTY FRANKEL

Drive down tree-shaded Violet Street in Farmington and you are immediately drawn to the gay flowers blooming by the curb in front of Ruth and Raymond Esper's house.

Ruth loves flowers so much that she has created a charming little garden between the sidewalk and the road so that all who pass by have a brighter day.

The Espers also have



RIPLING Waters, a pale lavender iris with a bright orange beard, is one of Ruth Esper's favorite irises.

flowers by their front door, in the side yard, across the back of the house, and in a wide border around the lawn in the back yard. The lawn, however, is a play space devoted to a swing set, picnic table, and other equipment in summer and to a skating rink in winter, proving that kids and flowers are not incompatible.

Although Mrs. Esper likes all kinds of flowers, iris are her favorites and she's got so many different varieties of iris that she has lost track of how many she actually has. Now reaching their peak of bloom are over 100 varieties of tall bearded iris. There are also lots of dwarfs and intermediates and some Siberian and spuria iris. Mrs. Esper says that she no longer bothers to count how many she has, but just tries to figure out where she has room for another kind.

THE GARDENS were started when the Espers moved into the house over 20 years ago. Among the first flowers they planted were some old fashioned blue "flags," and over the years many friends and relatives have shared their iris with the Espers.

Mrs. Esper bought her first variety about 15 years ago. Since then she has bought many of the new tetraploid hybrids and has even created a few hybrids of her own.

The new hybrid iris, unlike the rather tailored blooms of the old blue "flags," have very large flowers with crisp flaring petals that are often ruffled or fluted on the edges. The stems are tall and sturdy and the color range is truly incredible. They really are aptly named for the goddess of the rainbow.

Many of the iris in Ruth Esper's garden are Dykes Medal winners. This award is given each year by the American Iris Society to recently hybridized iris, and they are outstanding, even among a yard full of other beauties.

Although they are not Dykes Medal winners, Mrs. Esper has a special fondness for her own hybrids, especially one with short stems and pale yellow ruffled flowers.

When hybridizing, Mrs. Esper decides which traits she wants to develop and selects the parents accordingly. She often uses a white flower as one of the parents. With a tweezers she carefully removes the pollen-bearing anther from beneath the crest in the center of one flower and applies the pollen to the stigma on the crest of the other parent flower. Then she lets nature take over.

The seed pod that is produced is stored until fall and then the seeds are planted. Although some seedlings come up the following spring, many take until the second year to appear. In about three years the plants start to flower. Most of the new plants are not unusual, but once in a while an outstanding flower is produced.

THE NEW HYBRIDS and Dykes Medal winners are very costly when they first come on the market, but with a few years they become plentiful and the price drops. The older beauties are available for less than a dollar.

Mrs. Esper claims to have no favorite iris, but among her treasures are Rippling Waters, a pale lavender with a ruffled edge; Cliffs of Dover, a tall white; Garden Party, apricot pink; Sable Night, dark purple; Moonlight Madonna, pale yellow; Teckny Chimes, bright yellow; and Tom-Tom, bi-color amber.

Mrs. Esper advises growing iris where they get lots of sun - the more the better. They need at least a half day of sunshine. Also keep the iris beds away from competing tree and shrub roots for best results.

Ordinary garden soil is fine for iris, but Mrs. Esper works compost and bone meal and dehydrated manure into the soil when she is transplanting the iris. She digs up and divides the clumps every few years when the roots crowd each other. If they are crowded they do not bloom well.

IF MRS. ESPER is trying to produce blooms to exhibit in a show she puts a small handful of 5-20-20 fertilizer around each plant in early spring, being careful to keep it off the leaves. For ordinary garden display this extra fertilizing is not necessary.

The iris in the Esper garden are enhanced by many other perennials that bloom at the same time. Ruth is especially proud of an old-fashioned gas plant (Dictamnus) which she grew from seeds given to her by a friend. It is a large clump with tall spikes of dainty pink flowers. Also blooming now are oriental poppies, painted daisies, coral bells, columbine, helleborus, lupines, veronica, rose geraniums and forget-me-nots.

Soon peonies will add to the show and later when the iris are no longer in bloom the garden will be brightened by lilies, delphinium, shasta daisies, coreopsis and day lilies.



RUTH ESPER displays some of the hundreds of kinds of iris growing in her garden. In the foreground is white "Cliffs of Dover" and she is pointing out the ruffled blooms on blue "Lady Ilse".

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