

## Willott Iris Garden 2021 Growing Season Report



*Dorothy Willott*

*Photo- Sandra Pindell*



Bearded Irises

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As the 2021 growing season at the Willott Iris Garden came to a close we were saddened by the news of the death of Dorothy Willott, who passed away November 20th. We are dedicated to keeping alive the irises that were the life work of Tony and Dorothy.

The Willott Iris Garden had a great spring. The Rockefeller Park Greenhouse and surrounding gardens were re-opened to the public on May 7<sup>th</sup> after being closed for 13 months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The re-opening came just as the bloom of the Miniature Dwarf Bearded Irises had begun to wane and the bloom of the Standard Dwarf Bearded Irises was beginning to peak. The largest number of clumps of iris in the garden were in bloom on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, a few days earlier than last year. Because the garden is open 42 hours a week and we are only in the garden 20 hours a week we can only guess at the number of visitors, maybe 1,500 plus from May 7<sup>th</sup> through the end of the bloom season in early June and all the way into November.

An estimated 1500 + visitors welcomed back after the re-opening

On May 22<sup>nd</sup> the Willott Iris Garden was visited by the members of the Region 6 (Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio) of the American Iris Society convention sponsored by the North East Ohio Iris Society. Forty-plus knowledgeable *isisarians* visited the garden and gave rave reviews.

Having visitors back in the garden gave the Willott Iris Garden volunteers back their docent duties. We talked to hundreds of people about irises, the All-America Selections Garden, the Vegetable Garden, the Greenhouse, the Cultural Gardens and the new “Irises of the Future” test garden put in by the North East Ohio Iris Society. Of course, docent duties took some time away from the care of the irises and other tasks, but with the park re-opened to visitors we had a few more volunteers to help us with the weeding and grooming of the irises early in the season.

While the park was re-opened to visitors the Greenhouse plant sale was still canceled for the year. We were, however, able to sell our potted irises throughout the growing season, which financially made up for the loss of the sale. We were also able to continue to follow our plan begun last year to remove some of our excess irises and dig and divide to realign some problem clumps. All this digging gave us almost 1,800 pots of nearly 90 different iris cultivars ready for sale in 2022! Those potted irises will be on sale whenever there is an authorized volunteer in the garden and, of course, at the planned 2022 May Plant Sale.

As the Willott Iris Garden ages it is taking on some of the characteristics of a free public museum. The people who run a museum need to know what they have, where it is, what its condition is and where they got it from. We work very hard at doing just that. When the holdings of a museum are living and growing it adds to the complexity. An active museum is constantly working to improve its collection by “accessioning” and “de-accessioning” items in its holding. An active museum also arranges and re arranges the public display of its collection from time to time to make it more attractive and educational.

### Additional Willott cultivars added

This year we “accessioned” some additional Willott cultivars into the collection. The new additions needed room to grow so we removed, “de-accessioned,” some duplicate clumps and reduced others to make room for the new and growth of the old. At the end of the 2021 season we had about one fourth of all the cultivars the Willotts introduced in their many years of hybridizing work. We are looking for the other three quarters.

Because the Willott Iris Garden is in a public park, with a constant stream of visitors, we cannot use the chemical herbicides and pesticides often used by commercial and home gardeners. So careful, hands-on plant care and weeding are essential and also time consuming. Fortunately, the lead volunteers can quickly train others to help with the weeding and grooming tasks that keep the garden healthy.

To get detailed information on how to volunteer or to make a financial contribution to help care for the Willott Iris Garden visit [Rockefellerparkgreenhouse.org](http://Rockefellerparkgreenhouse.org)

*Robert Pindell*  
*Curator, Willott Iris Garden*

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Malibu Wildfire



Little Violet Charm



Ruby Slippers



Willott Iris Garden Team From left-Ron, Sandra, Bob