



# The Trillium

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Piedmont Chapter  
North American Rock Garden Society  
Chapel Hill, Durham, Raleigh, NC

## Camellia Collecting in China

By David Parks

Collecting Camellias in China is a fascinating experience botanically and culturally. On my trips to China I assisted my dad, Clifford Parks, in an effort to sort out the taxonomy of the genus, which has over 200 species according to some authorities. Very limited material is available in our country of some species, which have been named only in the last few years. We wanted to see the population and the variability within populations to determine if some of these newer species are valid.

Probably the biggest challenge in China is finding populations of plants, since the natural vegetation is highly disturbed due to the high population density. Several of the best sites I have seen are sacred mountains preserved for their religious significance. Although on the path up to one summit, there appeared to be a family living in a cave selling drinks to the passing tourists. There are people everywhere and evidence of people even in preserves or scenic areas.

There are a few preserves such as the Camellias Luteoflora Park funded by the World Wildlife Fund. At this preserve we were being shown around by an elderly farmer who had discovered this yellow flowered Camellia. We had seen a few blooming plants with metal labels in the for-



Photo from CamelliaForest.com

**Camellia sasanqua 'Autumn Sunrise'**



Photo from CamelliaForest.com

**Camellia x 'Solstice'**

est and were looking for more plants several miles from the road. There were farms carved into the hillsides with terraces for growing corn and other crops. Suddenly we were flagged down by a couple of men wearing dress shoes. (We had trouble staying upright on the slippery trail.) I never figured out who these men were but they told us through an interpreter that we were not allowed to be there. Only Chinese were allowed at this preserve. So we when back down the trail and had lunch with these men. Ironically the old man slipped my dad a branch of the yellow Camellia.

At a site in Sichuan we found a population of spectacular camellias which we could not identify. The flowers varied from white to deep pink with striking markings. The flower size ranged from small to medium and the foliage was also quite variable. Specimens from two extreme indi-

viduals would be considered separate species if examined in a herbarium because of both qualitative and quantitative differences. Yet we had seen these differences in a small area probably less than five acres in size and the dif-

ferences were over a spectrum with graded changes from plant to plant. By seeing a population it was obvious these were a single variable species not two separate species. At this site we were invited into the home of the vil-



**Camellia japonica 'Korean Snow'**

lage chief and waited while a young pig was slaughtered and prepared in a soup. We had to honor the chief and share a meal which seemed an important part of the culture and often consumed time needed for botanizing. Our guides seemed to enjoy the banquets and socializing, which allowed the connections required to enter some of the preserves, I presume.

Photo from CamelliaForest.com

I found that there are less disturbed areas in the mountains if you could get far enough away



**Camellia 'Adeyaka'**

Photo from CamelliaForest.com



**Camellia japonica 'October Affair'**

Photo from CamelliaForest.com

from roads and easy access. At the end of a long winding road into the mountains of Guizhou ,we hiked across fields into some steep woods and a location known to have the Camellia species we were looking for. About twenty men were moving large crepe myrtle stumps out of the mountains presumably to be used for Chinese style bonsai, which are often quite large. I wondered how many miles these stumps had been dragged. Clearly these stumps had regrown after the original trunks had been harvested for lumber.

We reached the Camellia location where a beautiful specimen of an evergreen Magnolia was growing but could not find any Camellias. After talking to the tree movers, we learned there are lots of camellias but it would take two or three hours to reach them. Although we didn't see camellias that day it did give me hope that there are wild camellias left in China. The logistics of finding these camellias is the challenge. ☞

*David Parks is the manager/owner of Camellia Forest Nursery, Chapel Hill, NC.*

*Editor's Note: Photo images are from the Camellia Forest Introductions by Cliff and David Parks, many from the early China exploration trips.*



**Camellia japonica 'Mieko Tanaka'**

Photo by William Jervis





## *Plant Profile...* by Charlie Kidder

Botanical name: *Tetranneuris acaulis* (syn. *Hymenoxys acaulis*)

Common Name: Stemless Four-Nerve Daisy, Butte Marigold, Stemless Rubberweed

Family:: Aster (Asteraceae)

Category: Perennial

Primary uses: Rock Garden

Dimensions: 12 inches tall including flower stalks, by 15 inches wide

Culture: Full sun, well-drained soil; tolerates drought. Reportedly, a taproot makes transplanting difficult.

Bloom time: Heaviest in early spring, but nearly year-round if temperatures are moderate and it is kept dead-headed

Color: Bright yellow

General attributes: *Tetranneuris acaulis* is native to the Great Plains and middle elevations of the mountains of the western United States and adjacent Canada, where it is found on dry hillsides. (*Tetranneuris herbacea* is similar, an endangered species of the Midwest.)

*Tetranneuris acaulis* has been living happily on the roof of the Ruby McSwain Building at the JC Raulston Arboretum since at least 2007. It forms a tidy clump of evergreen (above 10 degrees F), slightly hairy leaves, providing a year-round presence. It reseeds a bit in the primarily Permatill beds, but still plays well with other plants. The evergreen foliage and cheery yellow flowers make it a great addition to any xeric garden. ↻



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Questions: [amelia.lane@gmail.com](mailto:amelia.lane@gmail.com)



## A Few of My Favorite Bulbs

by Bobby J. Ward

Snowdrops 'mid oak leaves and Cyclamen dancing,  
Hyacinths sunning and Lycoris prancing,  
Blue Scillas shivering late in the spring---  
These are a few of my favorite things.

Bulbs in brown tunics with roots pushing downward,  
'Ice Wings' that hover and leave me spellbound-ward,  
Crocuses smiling and having a fling---  
These are a few of my favorite things.

When the sleet gels,  
And the snow mounts,  
And I hide away.  
I simply remember my "fleurs favorites"  
And then I become---Monet.

Lumpy fat tubers and lilies 'Formosa',  
Mauve Colchicums, and corms amorosa.  
Ixia's 'Mabel' all purple without---  
These are a few of the "stars" that I tout.

Stormy rain lilies that bloom like confetti  
Move me to write operatic libretti.  
Sternbergias shout on autumnal days---  
All of these would make for handsome nosegays.

When the clouds gray,  
When the frost nips,  
And I'm in bad moods,  
Then I count up all of my favorite bulbs  
And wish I could play---etudes.

Crinums and Cannas and Callas consorting  
'Rembrandt' and 'Darwin' and 'Parrot' cohorting.  
Daffodils named after Alfred the King---  
Guess it seems that I like 'most ev'rything.

Dog's-tooth bright pendant, Pheasant's-eye' & hoopskirt  
Join in the geophytes' seductive group-flirt.  
Joyfully brings me to chant praise en masse:  
*O santi bulbas beatissimas!*

When the ice falls,  
When the sky's dark,  
And I'm staring--crazed,  
I always remember my favorite bulbs.  
Then I become---upraised. ♪

© 1995 by Bobby J. Ward (Parody of "My Favorite Things" by  
Oscar Hammerstein & Richard Rodgers)

## Piedmont Chapter , NARGS Rock Garden Speakers through Spring 2014

Jan. 18, 2014—David Parks

"Camellia Collecting in China"  
Camellia Forest Nursery  
620 NC Highway 54 West  
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Email: [camelliaforest@gmail.com](mailto:camelliaforest@gmail.com)  
919-968-0504  
Web site: [www.camforest.com](http://www.camforest.com)

Feb. 15, 2014—Kelly D. Norris

"The Smaller Bearded Irises and Their Companion  
Plants"  
Horticultural Manager  
Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden  
1101 25th St., Apt. 9  
Des Moines, IA 50311  
712-621-5399  
Email: [kellydn@frontiernet.net](mailto:kellydn@frontiernet.net)  
Web site: [www.kellydnorris.com](http://www.kellydnorris.com)

Mar. 15, 2014—Kenton J. Seth

"Lessons in Plant Hunting from the Caucasus"  
& "Crevice Garden Demonstration"  
540 Hill Ave., # 3  
Grand Junction, CO 81504  
Email: [ineedacupoftea@gmail.com](mailto:ineedacupoftea@gmail.com)  
970-623-6300

April 19, 2014—Leah Chester-Davis

"The Horticultural Legacy of John L. Creech"  
NCSU Extension Communication Specialist  
112 Shorecrest Dr.  
Davidson, NC 28036  
Cell phone: 704-617-3329  
Home phone: 704-895-1122  
Email: [lchesterdavis@earthlink.net](mailto:lchesterdavis@earthlink.net)





# Rainbow High

by Kelly Norris

“To make me fantastic  
I have to be Rainbow High!  
In magical colors”

From “Rainbow High,” Evita (1976)

I love irises—all kinds really. But I’m head-over-heels crazy for bearded irises. I guess it all started in 1999 at the kitchen table of Cal Reuter, a well-known irisarian from Wisner, Nebraska. Irisarian — that’s the proper terminology for someone crazier about irises than a normal person would think healthy. I’m one, and I’d venture a guess that if you aren’t one already, you may dub yourself so by book’s end. By a more vernacular version, we’re all just iris lovers. I was all of 12 the summer I sat at Cal’s kitchen table, pouring through his small-type catalog in search of what I didn’t know would become an all-consuming passion. I walked away with 10 cultivars that day, vowing to keep track of their names as a promise to Cal. He dug them from his expansive front-yard ‘field’, marked them, and sent them home with me in a box that got stuffed under the backseat of my grandma’s van. I remember feeling giddy about the whole excursion as we ambled down the dusty road away from Cal’s Spruce Gardens, checking over the seat to see that my box of plants was riding snugly as the trees at the edge of Cal’s property faded in the distance.



**‘Rainbow High’ (Keppel, 2009)**

Photo made available by Kelly Norris

Fast forward three years. In that short span of time, those 10 irises cultivated something deeper in me than I did in them. My collection grew to almost 350 varieties by the end of the summer of 2002. And it was in July of that year that I sent an email to a man named Cliff Snyder, who at the time owned Rainbow Iris Farm in Bartlett, Texas. Though I had no idea then, it was on July 30, 2002 that my life changed.

To make a long story short, I (a mere 15-year old) talked my parents into flying to Texas, buying, and subsequently relocating Rainbow Iris Farm to our farm in rural Bedford, Iowa. We tilled up seven acres, spent 320 plus man hours planting 40,000 rhizomes, and watched a former cattle pasture grow into a made-for-Iowa field of dreams. We opened for business on May 18, 2003 and haven’t looked back, except to chuckle at our craziness, since.



With this book, I feel like I’m telling an epic story about how to grow and love magically colored bearded irises, complete with a dashing cast of characters, a rich and historical backdrop, and an optimistic and enterprising protagonist — you. This then is a book for iris lovers — plant lovers of a special kind who seek out rhizome sales like garage sales, track the comings and goings of bearded irises with unabashed addiction, and approach color-laden standards, falls, and beards without fear. If you’re reading this book, you’re an iris lover already, or one in eager train-

ing. I hope reading this will be like having a dirt-inspired conversation over a cuppa or a chalet of bubbling Moscato. For purposes of full disclosure, I hope to cultivate nothing less than an all-out obsession in you by the close of this cover.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, gardeners should demand more than ever that their gardens look and feel like them, with plants that express their personal sense of style and character. Gardens should teem with our favorite plants. Mine teems with bearded irises, and with any luck yours does, or will, too. After all, bearded irises are a staid part of our horticultural heritage, grown throughout the world for a millennium and revered for their inarguable seat at the throne of spring. They're timeless, classic perennials. From humble beginnings in the wilds of the Caucasus and central Europe, these "flags" evolved into banners of spring, thanks to the passionate efforts of hybridizers from the 1840s to the present. Grandparents, aunts and uncles, and next-door

neighbors brought bearded irises into the lives of a new generation, decade on decade, sharing their passion for the rainbow with every twinkly eyed neophyte that strolled past on a mid-May afternoon. In that way bearded irises are beatnik passalongs, entering gardens more often through the back gate in a paper grocery bag than through the front in a black plastic pot.



**Silgrey's Beauty—tall bearded iris**

"lovers" in the iris world to help me winnow the thousands of worth-growing varieties into a dashing selection of must-haves and can't-live-withouts. I've also stuck my neck out and given you a list of my personal favorites at the end of each classification's chapter. After well over a decade of growing and loving bearded irises, I hardly lack for an opinion!

Sitting in front of my bookshelves looking at my nearly complete collection of the Bulletin of The American Iris Society from 1920 through the present, I'm daunted by the legions of passionate iris soldiers that have gone before me—breeding, writing, lecturing, judging, and exhibiting our favorite flower for decades before my existence. Though a little overwhelmed at the magnitude and depth of inquiry possessed in these tomes, I've found relief in one unifying idea—the body of their works exists because of an undying love for the genus Iris. I've taken it as a rally cry to translate that love into



**Lady Friend—tall bearded iris**

Photo from Rainbow Iris Nursery website

Photo from Rainbow Iris Nursery website

The diversity of bearded irises rivals that of any herbaceous perennial we can grow in temperate climates, sporting nearly all colors of the rainbow and innumerable permutations and variations. With such a banquet of cultivars and types to relish and feast, we're going to have a merry time. Amplify that with my tending-towards-hyperbolic nature of talking about plants, and this conversation is going to get thick in no time. I have so many cultivars to share, but limited pages in which to share them! I've employed the help of my fellow



**Baby Venus—dwarf iris**

Photo from Rainbow Iris Nursery website



words, figures, and photographs in this volume, which hopefully will keep a special place on shelves next to works probably wiser than mine. The real story of bearded irises is about passionate gardeners who swapped pollen through the mail, gathered in the lobbies of malls to exhibit flowers, and drove to little country churches to talk to garden clubs. So many works on the genus *Iris* have focused on these characters.



Photo from Rainbow Iris Nursery website

**Margaritaville—tall bearded iris**

and back fence irises evolved into a deeper obsession for many — a horticultural quest for more of that satisfying color that only irises do so well. Playing as kids in these dooryards, some of us touched an iris for the first time, pulled gently at its silky petals for a closer sniff, and then giggled with puerile delight. Why are bearded irises so special? I'm giddy to share everything I know in answer to that question. We'll tour and I'll teach, and after it's all through you might say that we've been on a rainbow high. ✨

With all respect, I chose instead to write more about their plants, which brings to mind one of my favorite quotes from J. Marion Shull's excellent tome Rainbow Fragments (1931)—“but all of these workers, mostly still in the prime of life and many of them with splendid new varieties to their credit, to single out any one for special mention would be invidious, and so their work must be left to speak for them, with the next generation of garden lovers, of Iris enthusiasts, to sit in judgment on their comparative merits.”

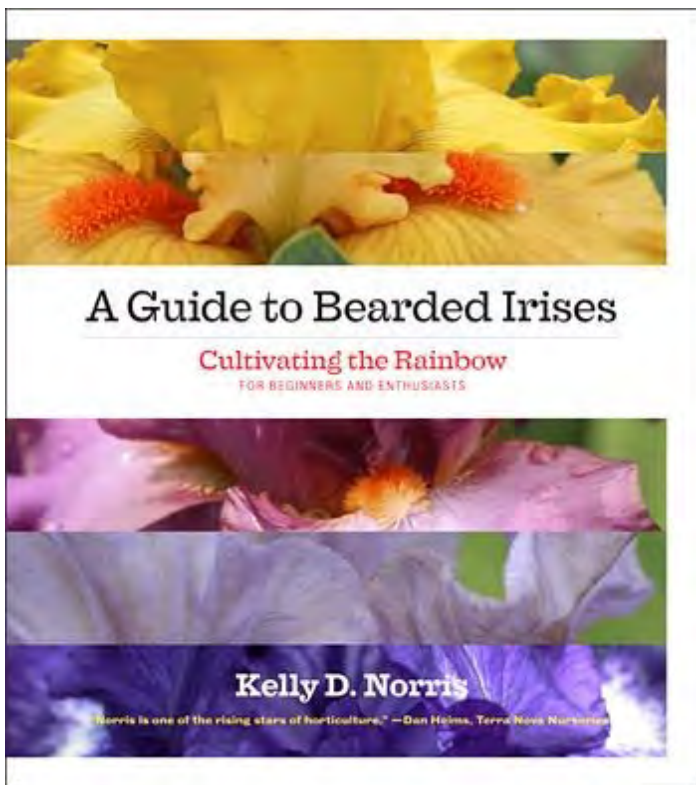
Bearded irises are staple perennials, sure. But generations of gardeners in search of springtime doers planted undownable bearded irises, sometimes along the back fence and nearly forgotten, or in the dooryard and kindly treasured, in a simple quest for May beauty.

Thankfully for us today, those dooryard



Photo from Rainbow Iris Nursery website

**I Repeat—tall bearded iris**



## A Guide to Bearded Irises

Order your signed copy directly form Rainbow Iris Farm. Rainbow Iris Farm. 3149 Kentucky Avenue, Bedford, IA 50833-8039. Shipping charges included in book price. \$48.95  
Copies will be available at the meeting

“it’s a rainbow of a book, with deliciously coloured section pages and graphics that mark it out as having a modern approach to this potentially old-fashioned flower.”

—Independent (London)

“Norris is a charming guide. It’s difficult not to be seduced by his enthusiasm and tantalizing descriptions of the colors, textures, ruffles and patterns of the iris species.”

—Publishers Weekly

“Norris offers fresh inspiration, as well as growing tips and descriptions of recommended cultivars.”

—NJ.com

**NARGS Piedmont Chapter  
Meeting —9:30 a.m.**

JC Raulston Arboretum  
Ruby McSwain Education Building

“Camellia Collecting in China  
January 28, 2014

**David Parks**

Camellia Forest Nursery  
Chapel Hill .NC 27614

*The Trillium*, Newsletter of the Piedmont Chapter  
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**OTHER SIGNIFICANT POSITIONS:**

- Sept. Plant Sale Manager: Kirtley Cox  
Refreshments: Gwen and Maurice Farrier

**Food Goodies to Share**

If your last name begins with the letter below,  
please consider bringing something to share.

- |         |                 |
|---------|-----------------|
| Jan M—P | March U—W       |
| Feb Q—T | April Any & all |



Photo by Bob Hellwig.

An assortment of camellias blooming at Camellia Forest Nursery December 7, 2013 , given to Bob Hellwig and Gordon Whitaker during the celebration at Carol Woods Retirement Community of their marriage in New York City Thanksgiving weekend 2013.