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A Story for Flower Lovers

A Description of the Flower Plantations of Willis E. Fryer, one of Minnesota's Best Known Flower Growers.

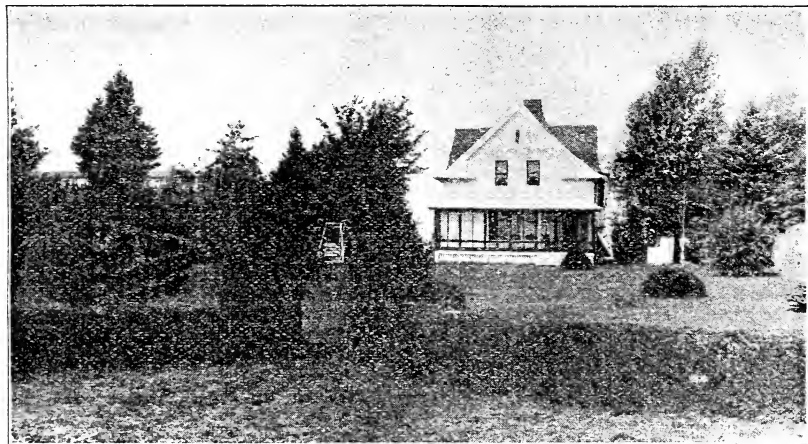
BY CLARENCE WEDGE

(From THE FARMER, St. Paul, Minn.)

NO ONE who knows much about the horticulturists of Minnesota will dispute the right of Mr. Willis Fryer of Mantorville to the title, "King of Flower Growers of the State." I'm not bringing the greenhouse men into this. They're a class by themselves—a very honorable and necessary class. But of all the outdoor flower enthusiasts that I know of in this part of the world, Mr. Fryer has brought together and compared the merits of more phlox, iris, Gladioli, dahlias and peonies and such perennial flowers than any other one of my acquaintance. And he has not done this merely as the whim and fancy of a rich man—an outlet for an overflowing pocketbook — but has managed to do it so as to make them bring a profit. He has turned them

man, and listen to his cheerful enthusiasm, would be the best possible tonic for a fainthearted person—like the words of the Master to the palsied man, "Be of good cheer!"

I had made up my mind this year that, come what might, I would take a day in iris season and again in phlox season to improve my education in the new and old things in these lines, by making a visit to the Fryer establishment. But when every day as you reach it is full of new work, it's hard to set the time and abide by it. And so I found the thirteenth of June, I had to make two close connections in order to make the sixty miles and back in one day, getting up in the small hours of the morning. And when I woke up, it was about to rain and my wife



Showing the Ornamental Plantings About the Home of Willis E. Fryer

into a beautiful and well-furnished home, an up-to-date automobile, and one of the best farms of the neighborhood. And this I have said for the purpose, more than any other, of adding that he has done all this under a physical handicap that would make many a man a burden to his family. To go over the flowers with Mr. Fryer, walking hour after hour, every step costing him three times the effort that it does the average

said, "what's the use?" I thought so myself — a hundred and twenty miles just to see some iris, and sprinkling enough to wet the walk. But if you make plans and don't live up to them you never get anywhere, and so I made myself go. Slowly and reluctantly the clouds thinned out, with now and then a dash against the car window to try my patience, and by ten o'clock Mr. Fryer had me at the station and was

taking me out in his new "six" auto. I told him that his old car was good enough for a nursery man, and where did he get the money? But he just smiled and handled the new levers and looked over the works and told me he had good reports from the shipments of Gladoli he had made to Australia.

I have never in my life seen a more interesting tenth acre of flowers than Mr. Fryer's little patch of seedling iris in full bloom June 13th. No show of named varieties that I have ever seen together could begin to compare with it. As I took my first view within the shelter of young evergreens that enclosed it, the first thing that caught my eye, towering above them all, was the stately variety that he has named for his wife, Mrs. Willis Fryer. It is a flower of the largest size, carried on strong stems 34 inches high, the standards of very light blue, giving at a distance the impression of white, the falls of the richest purple veined at the base and bordered or shaded at the edge with lighter purple. The health and vigor of the plant gives every promise of putting this variety among the really useful sorts for general planting. I do not recall any of the standard varieties of its color equal to it. In general effect, it might be compared with the Reine Nixe, but it is a much larger flower and more impressive in every way. If Mr. Fryer had accomplished nothing more in all his experiments with iris in the past twenty years than the production of this one variety, it would have been well worth his time.

In the main, however, I was impressed with the richness of the yellow and yellow-tinted varieties in his seedlings. The Honorable may be regarded as the standard by which to judge the other kinds of this shade. For richness of color, there is nothing that I have ever seen superior to it, but it is lacking in height and inferior in size. At the south end of his seedling patch, Mr. Fryer showed a very productive kind much larger than the Honorable, equally rich in yellow, with falls of a darker and a more solid mahogany, that is carried on stems at least six inches higher than that popular variety, of which it is no doubt a seedling. I am not sure that Mr. Fryer has named this variety, but he will certainly do so and it will be one of the things that I shall want to see on my own grounds as soon as possible.

He has named two varieties after

his children, W. J. and Kathryn Fryer, that may prove to be the most valuable of all the seedlings. They are both yellows of the largest size—the standards not quite so rich as the Honorable, but fully double the size and carried higher up, with falls of the deepest, velvety mahogany bordered with yellow. It is hard to choose between the two, but I think I should prefer the one he has named for his son. A bouquet of either one of them would cause a sensation anywhere they might be exhibited.

I have sometimes had inquiries for a red iris, which is so far from the natural color of this flower that it would seem like trifling with descriptive terms to suggest the possibility of there being any such thing. However, we found among Mr. Fryer's seedling collection two or three varieties of a rich mahogany red that it would be hard to describe without some mention of red. I do not now recall that he has given any one of these a name, but they are distinctive enough to demand special notice and should be of value as parents in working out seedlings of still stronger red. The iris is a difficult flower to describe and requires an artist in color to properly designate the shades that go to make up an individual flower. And so it is impossible to give anything like an adequate idea of the richness and beauty of this collection of hundreds of seedlings so diverse and interesting that it requires more than one visit to properly place the many good things that demand our attention.

The Siberian iris is a particularly interesting species on account of the extreme hardiness and its general adaptation to exposed places where the German and Japanese iris would be torn to pieces by storms. Its length of stem, sometimes approaching four feet or over, also adapts it to a variety of decorative purposes where the short stemmed kinds would be of comparatively little value. As with the other species, Mr. Fryer has given this class considerable attention and I had an excellent opportunity to compare the merits of the different varieties. Of the long stemmed kinds, Mr. Fryer considers the Superba the largest in flower and the most effective for general use. I saw it in a number of places on his grounds and it was everywhere making a very rich show. The Grandis, I should call the next in value. It is much like the Distinction but with longer and lighter colored falls.

These two, with the Alba or white Siberian, would make a trio of the most useful of the long-stemmed sorts. They are entirely distinct and worthy of a place in any lawn where the iris is used for decorative effect. Of the later blooming and shorter stemmed varieties, the Orientalis and Snow Queen are quite indispensable, blooming as they do just after the German varieties, and like their longer stemmed sisters, of extreme hardiness and wind-resisting qualities. The Snow Queen is almost in a class by itself and always attracts a great deal of interest wherever it is grown.

Mr. Fryer was one of the first in Minnesota to experiment with the new *Hydrangea, Arborescens*, or Hills of Snow, as it is sometimes called, and I was pleased to find that he regards it as "one of the finest

shrubs there is." He has had blooms all measuring 15 inches in diameter. He says that with him it begins in June and with proper trimming he can pick flowers as late as September. He has a method of trimming that increases the time of bloom on older plants. He leaves the center of the bush with little or no trimming for early blooms, and by cutting back the outer branches, all around the shrub, gets a crop of later blossoms from them. His older plants are doing well out in the full exposure, but knowing the natural habitat of the plant to be in shady places, I am inclined to think that with partial shade he would have even more success than he has made in this new and valuable shrub.

After his visit here in August he writes *The Farmer* as follows:

A Description of New Varieties of Phlox and Other Flowers Developed by Willis E. Fryer of Mantorville, Minn.



One of Mr. Fryer's Phlox Beds, all New Seedlings. The Row in the Center is the Variety Which is Known as Mrs. Fryer.

Some time last June we told the readers of *The Farmer* about our visit to Mr. Willis E. Fryer's place at Mantorville, Minnesota, in the iris season. In August we yielded to the temptation to make another trip to see his large collection of phlox and gladiolus in full bloom. At the time we made the visit, August 19th, everything in Southern Minnesota was suffering from the extreme heat and drought which had prevailed for several weeks, and flowers

of all kinds were withering almost as fast as they opened. But even under such unfavorable circumstances, the fields of phlox and gladiolus were among the most brilliant and interesting that we have ever seen, a display well worth the fifty-mile trip.

Among the varieties of phlox produced by Mr. Fryer, the *Amelia* impresses me as not only one of his best, but one that should take a high place among standard varieties. It

has a deep, pink eye, shading out to a pale lavender-white. I have had this on my own grounds for some time and have found it very healthy and satisfactory in blooming and would place it easily among my best ten varieties.

Mrs. Mellinger, another one of Mr. Fryer's own phloxes, is a fine, rosy red of solid color and florets of the largest size. Dr. Christopher Graham is a deep pink, somewhat later than Amelia and seemed to stand the heat remarkably well. Dr. A. L. Baker is a fine plant of very even height—magenta color.

About the nearest approach to blue that we have ever seen in a phlox is one that he has named Mrs. K. Andrist. While the dark shades in the phlox are not generally so attractive, they furnish an interesting variation and one variety will be an acceptable addition to any collection.

One of the most interesting things in phlox that we have ever seen was the Curiosity, which produces blooms from the same plant in all shades from pure white through all variations in marking to nearly pure red. Its name is certainly appropriate. From this variety, Mr. Fryer has made a selection of pure white that comes very true to color and forms one of the most satisfactory of all the whites. This he has named in honor of his wife, Mrs. Fryer. I saw this variety in several places on his grounds and it seemed everywhere to be one of the rugged kinds that make good in unfavorable seasons. If I remember rightly, Mr. Fryer regards this as one of his best all-purpose whites he has ever tried.

Among the gladiolus I was again greatly impressed with the variety that he has named Mrs. W. E. Fryer. It is certainly one of the most robust and dependable of the red varieties and seems especially adapted to landscape effects. Unlike Mrs. Frances King, which has enjoyed great popularity, it requires no staking but stands with a stiff, strong stem, perfectly erect and sending out several branches, making as full and rich a show of color on the lawn as any variety that I have ever seen. The color is particularly rich and satisfying. It is a good propagator, full of life and vigor, and should succeed wherever the gladiolus can be grown.

I have seen a good deal of the Niagara this season and find it everywhere making a good account of itself. It is clearly one of the best of the yellow varieties, and deserves a

place in every collection. I thought it stood the heat particularly well during the trying days of August.

As an extra early variety of gladiolus, Mr. Fryer favors the Halley rather than the Pink Beauty, which is commonly used for first early. This is also the judgment of Mr. Ralph Huntington and we think it may safely be set down as one of the best, if not the best, for first early in the North.

Mr. Fryer prefers the Arizona gladiolus to the Panama which has lately had so much popularity. If it is really better than the Panama, Mr. Fryer ought to be a judge. It deserves a large place with gladiolus growers, for varieties of this soft pink shade seem to be more popular with the public than any other.

Mr. Fryer is having good success with the yellow variety of gladiolus originated by Mr. Black, the Golden King, and regards it the best of the yellows with blotch of red in the throat.

Among the ruffled varieties of gladiolus, the Mantorville is one of Mr. Fryer's naming, a fine yellow, sometimes tinted with pink. It is proving a good propagator and may turn out to be one of the best of the yellows.

There was nothing at Mr. Fryer's place that I enjoyed more than his wonderful larkspurs. I wish I could say something that would give the larkspur a boom all over the North. It has every quality required in a popular flower. There are few perennials that do not suffer winter injury in some peculiar seasons, but I do not remember of ever losing a larkspur in the worst winters we have ever had. It may now be enjoyed in all shades from pure white to the darkest blue with an infinite variations in shape, size and distribution of color. There is certainly no other blue flower to compare with it. It is not only one of the sturdiest of border plants, but when cut and brought into the house it is as graceful and enduring as anything that grows. If given an occasional pruning and not allowed to go to seed, it will go on blooming all summer. With us it is generally among the few perennial flowers that are destroyed by the freezes of late October. Mr. Fryer has a number of sorts that he has selected and may send out under names in the near future. We have never seen a finer collection and have no doubt that it is among the best in the country.