



photo from Astro Branch, ABS website

Begonia 'Iris Shepherd'

by Kingsley Langenberg
Waukegan, Illinois

In 1980 I realized a dream by adding a greenhouse onto my home. A generous ABS Round Robin member, Iris Shepherd of Port Arthur, Texas, sent me many cane-like cuttings to populate my newly created environment.

I had read a well-written article by Belva Kustler about how she hybridized begonias. Inspired by her beautiful plants, I started my own efforts in the spring of 1981. I dusted female flowers of B. 'Flamingo' Hunter (*B. dichroa* x *B. undulata*) with pollen from B. 'Lenore Olivier' Kusler (*B. dichroa* x *B. 'Elaine'*.) I harvested seed on July 6, 1981 and planted some of it the same day. It germinated on July 17, 1981. One of the most attractive seedlings had beautifully speckled leaves, but as it matured, it lost its spots. But then it flowered - large pendulous bunches of pale-pink, sweet-scented flowers.

I thought it might be good enough to register with ABS. so on November 18, 1985, I sent cuttings to growers, including Iris Shepherd for their evaluation. Iris wrote back that she liked the cultivar especially because in was a compact cane, her favorite type.

But there's a sad part of this story: we moved in 1982 and I had no greenhouse. So wintering all those canes down in a basement room under lights was "a learning situation." In 1984, I became a parent for the first time and my priorities changed. I lost my only B. 'Iris Shepherd' in February, 1986. By 1991 I had pretty much stopped growing begonias seriously.



Now, seventeen or so years later, my daughter doesn't require as much of my time, and I've recently retired. So the search was on for a hobby. I had been receiving *The Begonian* all these years, so I dug out some recent issues and read them from cover to cover.

I learned that begonias had gone onto the internet, and while surfing the 'net, I came across the excellent website of the Astro Branch. I was looking at the great pictures of George Macias' gorgeous collection when all of a sudden I saw a listing of B. 'Iris Shepherd'! I said to myself: "No, it couldn't be." But then I looked at the picture. Then I ran and got out my pictures. Then I really went nuts. My begonia was still alive!

So I contacted George with my tale. He emailed back how he enjoyed my story. He also wrote: "I acquired the plant as 'Irish Shepherd,' but a visitor set me straight and told me she knew Iris Shepherd."

I looked up "Iris Shepherd, Port Arthur, Texas" on the Internet and found that she is still listed at her original address. I must write her after all these years and update her on her namesake.

From my observation, it is not at all unusual to find misspelled or misnamed begonias. However it may happen, I am thankful that I can use the begonia chat list on the Internet to correct the name change that happened to this plant.

I think that I should get busy now and register my cultivar with the American Begonia Society, now that I've learned that it has a distribution that I would never have dreamed.