

# 'Isabelle Rose' - The Best and The Brightest

by Madis Nurms

Stout Silver Medal is the highest award a daylily cultivar can receive. Thousands of new varieties are registered yearly, so the competition to win this award is fierce. In 2022, twelve cultivars made the top-list, but only one will be crowned the champion each year. This time it turned out to be a graceful bright white diploid 'Isabelle Rose' (Laprise, 2009). In the final round of AHS' pyramid of awards, it went neck-to-neck with such superb daylilies as 'Papa Goose' (Douglas-H., 2011) and 'All Things to All Men' (Emmerich, 2012), so there is no doubt that the medal was well deserved. Winning the coveted Stout medal is a testament to the winner's extraordinary beauty and outstanding performance. Here are some excerpts from my conversation with the author of the titleholder, **Ellen Laprise**.



Isabelle Rose in Paul Owen's garden

As Laprise said right after winning the award, she had no doubt that she had already hit the jackpot with 'Isabelle Rose' when it was still a seedling. First of all, it had a stunning alabaster bloom that Laprise had wished for. In her hybridizing she focuses on crossing the whitest of cultivars. "When I began, the whitest daylilies that I knew of were 'Gentle Shepherd' (Yancey, 1980), 'Joan Senior' (Durio, 1977), 'Radiant Moonbeam' (Larch, 1978), 'Starsearch' (Warrell, 1996) and 'Chesieres Lunar Moth' (Hirsbrunner, 1994)," she says. "In 1999, I lined out all the white pollen on white daylily crosses and chose the ones with the best foliage and then the ones that held up in the sun and rain. Five remained years later. One short one is a very pure white (the whitest in my garden) spatulate, fertile daylily which produces all white seedlings. The other four are still very popular here and will be named." Although 'Isabelle Rose' was registered as pale yellow, in the daylily whiteness evaluation project headed by Stuart Kendig, it has been consistently rated as Group 3. Daylily blooms in this group are very white, almost white enough to classify as bright as 'Gentle Shepherd' et al.

Secondly, a hybridizing goal she was always drawn to was to search for Unusual Forms. Laprise has been aiming to create a cascading white daylily in the form of Clayton Burkey's 'Lola Branham', with its lovely curls. Gushing 'Isabelle Rose' comes from 'Starsearch' crossed with 'Heavenly Curls' (Gossard, 2000). 'Starsearch' is known as a prolific bloomer with crispate blooms, and 'Heavenly Curls' is truly an epitome of an unusual form with whimsical twisted and curly blooms that are really a feast for the eyes! She continues: "Next year, in 2000, Jamie Gossard came out with 'Heavenly Curls'. I used its pollen on all near white Unusual Formed daylilies that I had, such as 'Ghost Ranch' (Roberts-Roberts, 2007), 'Scandinavia' (Mahieu, 2003), 'Snowboarding' (Reed, 2005), 'Gadsden Icicle' (Reinke-J., 2004) 'Glacial Epoch' (Reed, 2004), 'Ice Water' (Reed, 2007), 'Margo Reed Indeed' (Murphy-J.P., 2004) and 'Pale Behemoth' (Murphy-J.P., 2009). To compare and contrast, I planted all the near white seedlings in one garden ." Being an AHS daylily judge, she certainly knew what to look for: "A strong scape is essential, but growers are willing to stake a particularly beautiful daylily if need be. Bud-building is an excellent trait for producing a long bloom season. The majority of my introductions and seedlings are diamond dusted and have a waxy coating on their foliage. These traits help the daylily to withstand sun, rain, insect damage and disease. I've selected for these qualities since I began collecting daylilies."

I would say that 'Isabelle Rose' is a true heartbreaker because everybody I have spoken to has immediately fallen in love with it. Viktorija Vysniauskiene, the owner of a vast daylily collection in Lithuania, confirms the positive image: "It's a very nice variety. It blooms profusely, is a very hardy, vigorous grower and has strong scapes. It looks especially nice in a clump." The only downside, she points out, is that the height of the scapes in her garden is not 150 cm, as registered in the daylily database, but reaches only 110 cm. Vysniauskiene has also used 'Isabelle Rose' in hybridizing. Its offspring, 'Apatura White Swallow' (2023) has a bloom diameter of a whopping 23 cm and is a UF cascade with many different faces. 'Isabelle Rose' actually seems to be a fairly popular parent plant on this side of the big pond. Its

other European descendant, from Gabriele Behrens, called 'Holsteiner Beautiful Madness' (2021) has a wingspan of 25 cm. Harald Juhr's 'Melancholy for the Wind' (2017) is a creamy green Spider with a ratio of 6.00:1, and Ukrainian Iryna Lukava has registered 'Nebesni Lastivky' (eng Heavenly Swallows, 2020), a tall cultivar that carries on the cascade form of its pollen parent. Laprise herself would suggest crossing 'Isabelle Rose' with other cascading daylilies or ruffled diploids: "If you are looking for whites, then use a white as a parent. I find that pollinating 'Isabelle Rose' at night is most successful. When I cross white daylilies with 'Isabelle Rose', I get white seedlings. It is very good at passing on nice clear white seedlings. If crossed with purples, the seedlings will be pink, lavender or purple."

Ellen Laprise lives in Dudley, Massachusetts. Her garden, called Partridge Hill Gardens, has over 1,500 different daylilies among her collection of unique perennials from all over the world. The family has been selling northern hardy, field-grown daylilies from their garden since 1997. The summers in Dudley are warm, winters are freezing and snowy. Over the course of the year, the temperature typically varies from -8°C to 27°C. The daylilies begin blooming in June, and go right through to late October, early November. Mid-July is peak bloom and from early July to mid August the weather is usually very nice and hot. The averages of temperature in Massachusetts are a bit higher than the average for U.K in summer months, and there is more rain. Laprise uses sprinklers but it's interesting to know that 'Isabelle Rose' as a seedling was not watered in her garden. Despite the lack of water, it soon began to display some wonderful characteristics: "It was a bud builder (a bud builder continues to produce buds at the tip of the scape). When one scape was done blooming, a new fan grew and produced another blooming scape. Due to these traits, bud count could be up to 43 and bloom season was from Early to Late," she says.

Laprise is a mother of two daughters, a grandmother of seven grandsons and four granddaughters. Isabelle was the name of the first and only granddaughter for many years. So that solves the mystery of where the beautiful name of the variety comes from. Laprise has a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Plant and Soil Science from Clark University, Worcester, a period of studies she refers to as "two years of heaven!" That certainly gave her some insight into growing our favorite perennial: "I can tell by looking at a daylily if it is low on certain nutrients. Soil is important if you want rapidly increasing daylilies. When I began my garden, we had truckloads of compost delivered. Everything grew like gangbusters." As an insider-tip, she suggests using your Fall leaves as a mulch to add organic matter to your soil. "The worms will come right up to eat them, thus aerating the soil."



Isabelle Rose

It's notable that Ellen Laprise has few registrations in the daylily database. For comparison Karol Emmerich who made it to the TOP 10 list this year has 229 registrations to date, Jan Joiner 194, Sandy Holmes 182 and Tim Herrington has 148 daylilies under his belt. And these are just the cultivars registered under their name, not including the joint-registrations. As a winner of Stout, now the question on everyone's lips is, of course, is she planning to register some new varieties and what new developments can we expect from her futures-bed? "I am in the process of registering my 2023 introductions and trying to get the names approved," she says. "In 2008, I was bitten by a tick and progressively lost my health as each year passed. Finally, in 2014, I was diagnosed with chronic Lyme. I had become bedridden by 2010, and it affected my memory and ability to speak clearly. It has taken years to get my health and energy back. So now I am back to getting my lined out seedlings introduced. They will be a mix of my favorite whites, pinks, hot oranges and purples." Her latest registration so far, 'Mee Hee Lee' (2011) certainly has distinction. It's a bluish lavender, with a large sculpted watermark. In addition to winning the Stout medal, this year was also special, because another of her introductions, called 'Flaming Flamingo' (2007) was on the ballot for the Award of Merit. Being a large tetraploid and bright orange with a glossy red eye, it's a whole different beast from 'Isabelle Rose'. But I'm happy to report that this beauty is also available in continental Europe as well as in the U.K.

It is notoriously hard to win a Stout medal because of the rules of the so-called pyramid awards of AHS. The candidate variety must be grown widely across the States. So naturally, I was curious if Laprise had a strategy for getting 'Isabelle Rose' distributed to as many gardens as possible or did it just happen? She responds that she was very fortunate to have good friends who supported her in this journey. "Isabelle Rose' was shipped all over the world and performed so well that she gained notoriety. She was sold to the United Kingdom, Russia, Belgium, Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia. People from all over the United States saw it growing at David Kirchhoff/Mort Morss's garden. Paul Owens had her on display at the 2014 National Convention, and I heard rave reviews. Annette Rice won Best in Show and Best Unusual Form in the Bluegrass Daylily Exhibition Shows a number of times and displayed her at Thoroughbred Gardens. My friends Mike Huben and Karin Cooke told everyone they knew about it. Much was sent out as bonuses and gifts."

Ellen Laprise's recommendations if you have an outstanding daylily:

- ◇ It's a good idea to wait until you have 20 fans before releasing for sale. I began with 10, so it took longer to get out in commerce.
- ◇ The garden judges are very important, as they do the voting. Become a garden judge. Invite the judges to your garden year after year to see your winning daylily as it becomes established.
- ◇ Try and send your outstanding introductions to the American Hemerocallis National and Regional Conventions, where they will be seen and photographed.
- ◇ Get active in your local Daylily Club and National Clubs.
- ◇ Submit your winner in the Daylily Exhibitions.
- ◇ Write articles about your hybridizing program for your Regional Newsletter and National Journal.
- ◇ Have a website and participate in social media.

### About Madis Nurms

*Madis Nurms is an internationally acknowledged Estonian theatre designer living in Berlin, Germany. In 2021, the book "Päevalillia" (The Daylily), written by him, was published in Estonian. The aim of the book is to present newer daylilies that do well in the North-European climate but also to grip the reader by telling the stories behind the selected cultivars. In most cases, there are wonderful backstories to daylilies - interesting facts about the way they came to be, their parentage, or how they got their names. The hefty book has 820 named cultivars, focus on less-known European cultivars, and has numerous illustrations and photos. Nurms, a passionate daylily lover, is also a member of the British Hosta and Hemerocallis Society committee and American Hemerocallis Society registration committee.*

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Isabelle Rose at Harmon Hill Farm—photos by Marlene Harmon