

American Iris Society: Payne Medal-JI

History written by Clarence Mahan

This medal is restricted to Japanese irises (JI). It is named in honor of W. Arlie Payne (1881-1971).

W. Arlie Payne was born on a farm near Terre Haute, Indiana. He graduated from Central Normal Collage in Danville, Indiana, and studied pattern making. Payne worked as a lumberjack, photographer, real estate agent, and pattern maker until he established a landscaping business on sixteen acres of land south of Terre Haute. He was at first especially interested in peonies, but in the late 1920's, he "discovered" Japanese irises. He started hybridizing Japanese in irises in 1932. Over the next three and a half decades, he raised many thousands of seedlings.

During the 1930's and 1940's, there was a sharp decline in the popularity of Japanese irises in the United States, especially during the period of WW II. One of the few nurseries on the West Coast that continued to offer them for sale renamed them "Pearl Harbor irises." Arlie Payne continued his, extensive breeding program striving to produce "a race suitable for outdoor American plants." He sought a beautiful flower of symmetrical form and a plant that demonstrated exceptional vigor. One of the most exceptional aspects of his breeding program was that it was developed in the early years using only six cultivars of the Edo type. Payne took line breeding to a new level of intensity.

Arlie Payne did not start introducing his irises until the early 1950's. When he did, it was apparent that he had developed a strain of wonderful new Japanese irises. He ultimately registered 170 cultivars, most of which were of exceptional quality. When his new cultivars were sent to Japan, the Japanese were astonished to see their diversity and quality. The gigantic maroon, 3-fall cultivar 'The Great Mogul' (1958) was especially admired by Japanese specialists. Payne cultivars took the Gold, Silver and Bronze Medals in the Internationale Garten Ausstellug in 1963. 'The Great Mogul' won the Silver Medal at the Vienna Intenationale Gartenschaus in 1964, and 'Confetti Shower' won the Bronze Medal at the same event.

The American Iris Society awarded Arlie Payne its coveted Hybridizers Medal in 1964. When he died at the age of 90, in 1971, he was universally revered as the world's premier breeder of Japanese irises.

From the Society for Japanese Irises (SJI): The Payne Medal (named for W. Arlie Payne) is the highest award given by the American Iris Society that a Japanese iris can receive in its class. Payne Medal winners are then eligible to win the Dykes Medal, which is the highest award an iris can receive from The American Iris Society. Prior to 1992 the highest award a Japanese Iris could receive was the Payne Award. This award has now been elevated to a medal status. Below is a list of Japanese Irises which have received the Payne Award and/or the Payne Medal.

Winners: PAYNE MEDAL Japanese (JI)

2019 CASCADE RAIN (Chad Harris) and INDIGO ANGEL (Bob Bauer/John Coble) tie
2018 KIMONO SILK (Bob Bauer/John Coble)
2017 OH SO PINK (Donald Delmez)
2016 JOHN'S FANCY (Jill Copeland)
2015 SUGAR DOME (Bob Bauer/John Coble)
2014 LADY IN PINK (Terry Aitken)
2013 BEWITCHING TWILIGHT (Chad Harris)
2012 COHO (Chad Harris)
2011 LAKE EFFECT (Bob Bauer/John Coble)
2010 SUE JO (Donald Delmez)
2009 LITTLE BOW PINK (Donald Delmez)
2008 RASPBERRY CANDY (Bob Bauer/John Coble)
2007 Dirigo Pink Milestone (John White)
2006 Sing the Blues (Lorena Reid)
2005 Blue Spritz (Donald Delmez)
2004 Epimetheus (Sterling Innerst)
2003 Lion King (Bob Bauer/John Coble) and Raspberry Glow (Terry Aitken) tie
2002 Electric Glow (Terry Aitken)
2001 Picotee Princess (Lorena Reid)
2000 Bellender Blue (Bob Bauer/John Coble)
1999 Geisha Obi (Lois Rich)
1998 Butterflies in Flight (Terry Aitken)
1997 Electric Rays (Terry Aitken) and Iapetus (Sterling Innerst) tie
1996 Edge of Frost (Marie Dienstbach) and Kalamazoo (Arthur Hazzard) tie
1995 Cascade Crest (Terry Aitken)
1994 Caprician Butterfly (Walter Marx/D. Rogers)
1993 Oriental Eyes (Adolph Vogt)

Winners: THE PAYNE AWARD Japanese (JI)

- 1992 Japanese Pinwheel (Currier McEwen)
- 1991 Lilac Peaks (Adolph Vogt)
- 1990 Caprician Butterfly (Walter Marx)
- 1989 Blueberry Rimmed (Currier McEwen)
- 1988 Oriental Eyes (Adolph Vogt)
- 1987 Freckled Geisha (Lorena Reid)
- 1986 Ipsus (Sterling Innerst)
- 1985 Blue Marlin (Jill Copeland)
- 1984 No Award
- 1983 Raspberry Rimmed (Currier McEwen)
- 1982 Returning Tide (Currier McEwen)
- 1981 Fuji (Thornton Abel)
- 1980 Purple Parasol (Currier McEwen)
- 1979 Prairie Velvet (Arthur Hazzard)
- 1978 Tuptim (Lois Rich)
- 1977 No Award
- 1976 Stranger in Paradise (Ben Hager)
- 1975 Prairie Love Song (Arthur Hazzard)
- 1974 No Award
- 1973 Hue and Cry (Frederick Maddocks)
- 1972 No Award
- 1971 Numazu (Arthur Hazzard)
- 1970 Worley Pink (Violet Worley)
- 1969 Star at Midnight (Lois Rich)
- 1968 Dancing Waves (W. Arlie Payne)
- 1967 Leave Me Sighing (Frederick Maddocks)
- 1966 Strut and Flourish (W. Arlie Payne)