



ROB MEETS...Alain CHAPELLE & Yolande AIRAUD of Jardin d'Iris in Bubry

ROB Listeners will remember listening to Alain and Yolande Chapelle telling us about Irises, and I'm here today to find out how to grow irises the best. First of all, Alain. Are Irises a good flower for Brittany?

ALAIN Brittany is very special because the soil is very acid, so for much of the plants you have to add lime in the garden.

ROB Like chaux.

ALAIN Yes, in French it's chaux yes.

ROB What effect does that have on the plant then?

ALAIN You know, the calcium is very important. For you, for the animals, for the plant also. Everything needs calcium, and you don't have calcium at all in the soil in Brittany so we have to add calcium.

ROB Is that regularly?

ALAIN At the beginning you have to add every year to get the level of the Ph. The Ph starts in Brittany 4.5, so it's very, very low. So you have to put lime every year until you get the Ph around 6, 6.5, 7... 7 is perfect. So you have to add lime every year for maybe 10 years and you can wait every 2 or 3 years.

ROB Giving this lime, chaux, to the plant, does this help with the leaf or the flower... or both?

ALAIN Most of the flowers, except the Rhododendron, or some very specific acid plant but most of the flowers, even roses, even daffodils, it's much better if you add lime, yes.

ROB Yes, but particularly for Irises.

ALAIN They don't grow very well if they don't have calcium.

ROB So, if you have an Iris in your garden, and it doesn't flower...

ALAIN Maybe it's this, yes.

ROB Ah.

ALAIN But it's not only... you need lime and you need also sun. If you plant them in the shadow you don't have the flowers also.

ROB Okay. Now I understood that you have to expose the rhizome, is that right?

ALAIN Yes, we must see the top of the rhizome, yes.

ROB Is that because it needs warmth, or....?

- ALAIN Of course warmth and sun also, on the rhizome. Also they can rot. If it is too wet they can rot.
- ROB That's a big problem in Brittany then?
- ALAIN Yes...no... if you put them at the surface or you can make a small moat, 10 cms you know, and you put them on the top of the ...
- ROB On the ridge?
- ALAIN Yes, so the water is going down and so, so it's okay.
- ROB If you lighten the soil with different material, if you introduce sand for example?
- ALAIN No, no. You don't have to. You have enough sand in the soil in Brittany. Of course you can put sand made by shells – we call this merl.
- ROB I saw, in your garden, you have a big pile of them.
- ALAIN Yes. This I put... it's not to make the soil less heavy...no it's not for this. It's just to add lime.
- ROB Tell me what this merl is made of then.
- ALAIN It's made of shells.
- ROB Sea shells?
- ALAIN Sea shells, yes.
- ROB So that breaks up the soil as well?
- ALAIN Yes, yes, yes.
- ROB And it adds calcium?
- ALAIN Yes, of course, yes... and also magnesium. In the merl also you have trace elements so it's...
- ROB It's nutrition, for the plant?
- ALAIN Of course for all the plants.
- ROB Do you need to fertilise Irises otherwise?
- ALAIN Yes, like in the garden, they need phosphorus and potassium. Nitrogen... very little. If you have more nitrogen it's not good, you get more leaves and not flowers. It's mostly potassium for all the flowers it's good. But if you have ashes...
- ROB From the wood fire?
- ALAIN It's perfect yes.



- ROB I know what to do with it now. I have it at home. And that applies to other flowers as well.
- ALAIN Yes, of course, yes. All the flowers... even for the vegetables you can use them. It's good also.
- ROB Good. Now, last time we spoke you gave us a little idea about your work here, which is not just to expose and sell Irises, but it's also to create new varieties.
- ALAIN Yes.
- ROB Now that's a very specialised thing to do.
- ALAIN Yes.
- ROB Are there many other people that do this... in Brittany?
- ALAIN Umm, maybe another one. In France yes maybe. Less than 10 in France.
- ROB Okay.
- ALAIN It's very interesting because I buy flowers from Australia, from... we buy... from, from America, from France or.... but it's nice to try to create new cultiva, new kinds of varieties. So, it's very easy to create new varieties, but creating very good varieties is more complicated. To create varieties, you take the pollen of one of the father – you have to choose a father and a mother – so you take the pollen of the father and you put it on the stamen of the mother. You can mix also because all the flowers they have pollen and they have stamen. So you can take the pollen of one variety and put it on another variety, and take the pollen of the second one and put... it's like creating a new... baby. You never have two babies... the same baby. All the time you have new cultiva, so you have to choose a good one. A good one is vigorous variety – stem very strong with a lot of branches – 4 branches is good and on each branch you have flowers, 1-2-3 flowers.. and you try to get new varieties, new associations of colour – I am quite famous in France because I create very bright orange “Flamboyance Dorée”, “Fulgurance”, “J’Veux du Soleil”, ... “Radiance” is a very new one. Of course I try to mix orange with another kind of orange or a very pale orange with a brown and after you try to get something very bright.
- ROB You have to be very patient with this don't you?
- ALAIN Yes...
- ROB Because it doesn't happen overnight.
- ALAIN No. Of course. And maybe you can make cross and after you see the baby 3 years later and nothing is good, so you have to, to, to try again, again... until you get something very...
- ROB You have to wait 3 years?
- ALAIN When you start, you need 3 years to see the first flowers...



YOLANDE But after you need, maybe, two years more...

ALAIN To be sure then that they are blooming every year... because if they are blooming every 2 years it's not good, you know. They must bloom every year.

ROB Right. Now we're at the very beginning of the season. Will you be introducing some new varieties to the public this year?

ALAIN Yes, of course.

ROB What, what... tell us about what you have in store for us.

ALAIN I have 6 new varieties I create.

ROB With some extraordinary names... « Effervescent », « Marin le Pétillant »... but also « Gilgamesh »... that's a fantastic name for a flower.

ALAIN Yes.

ROB This is a variety which will last forever. Is that right?

ALAIN I hope so... and "Marin le Pétillant"... Marin is one of my grandsons and he's very, very... yes petillant in France is...

ROB Is full of beans!

ALAIN Very good and strong energy.

ROB And this one is named after him?

ALAIN Yes, yes.

ROB Well I can recommend anyone in Brittany to come and see your garden. Alain Chapelle, thank you ever so much for your talk and your advice about growing Irises in Brittany. Thank you very much.

ALAIN Thank you. I'm very happy if you come in the garden, and if you want some more explanations, you ask me and I can tell you what to do and of course if you want to create new varieties I can tell you. But the most difficult thing to create new varieties is to know what is good in one Iris, what is not good, so you have to choose a good parent – and this I can explain if you want.

ROB Thank you very much indeed Alain.

ALAIN With pleasure.