Iris subbiflora

Walter Welch

Originally appeared in the *Dwarf Iris Society Beginners' Manual,* c. 1965. Photos have been added, and the text has been edited slightly to note current species names (in square brackets) and to conform with modern typographical conventions.

I. subbiflora, Brotero, 1804, is probably of the least interest to us and may be least known of all the dwarf iris species. It is native to the coastal region of Portugal and Spain and apparently is a close relative to *I. chamaeiris* [*I. lutescens*]. It has 40 chromosomes.

I received some seed from Jean Stevens of Australia and from these I grew eight plants, all of which have bloomed here for about four years. All are almost identical in color, which is a very dark violet self, with a bright yellow beard. The height varies considerably, ranging from about 7 inches to 12 inches. Dykes says it comes in a dark black-blue, a deeper color than he has seen in any other iris. He also says it may come in purple or a yellowish white, but I have noted no such colors among my own seedlings.

Actually I see little difference between *I. subbiflora* and *I. chamaeiris* except possibly in size. The former is a little larger, but otherwise it comes very close to *chamaeiris* type. There is no doubt, at least in my mind, that *I. subbiflora* is simply a different stage, or we might say a different geographical group or population, in the stream of evolution of *chamaeiris.* It is not nearly as differentiated from *chamaeiris* as are the Russian pumilas from the Austrian forms, or as the different variations of *I. pseudopumila.*

There existed quite a bit of misunderstanding about this species among the earlier collectors. It has been called *I. biflora, I. lisbonensis,* and *I. subbiflora* rather carelessly until Dykes finally helped to clarify the matter.

It appears that *subbiflora* performs wonderfully in southern California, and Mr. John Tearington is highly enthusiastic about its fine qualities. Thus far we know far too little about it, but for its dark color alone it has potentialities for our breeding program.

I. subbiflora ex Spain
photo: Tom Waters

I. subbiflora
photo: Rafael Díez Domínguez

I. subbiflora
photo: Harald Mathes