

# Greenway Garden Retreat

By Lewis Bozard

My garden in South Charlotte, North Carolina, is a young garden, started in 2019. It surrounds the house on a half-acre lot gently sloping from the street toward McAlpine Creek and the public greenway just beyond the back garden. Greenway Garden Retreat gets its name from that proximate greenway and the retreat-like vibe I hoped to create. When I acquired the property the only landscaping consisted of several mature trees and basic shrubbery across the front of the house. The remainder was a grassy expanse awaiting garden vision like a blank canvas before an artist.



‘Indian Chief’  
(W.M. Ayres 1929)



‘Clarence’  
(L. Zurbrigg 1991, RE)



‘Go Hokies’  
(D. Spoon 2018)



On the sunny afternoon of April 27, Greenway Garden Retreat was the last official garden stop of the 2024 Spring Region 4 meeting. Near the street grew large clumps of three proven performers, selected to catch the eyes of neighborhood passersby: ‘Indian Chief’ (W.M. Ayres 1929), ‘Clarence’ (L. Zurbrigg 1991, RE), and ‘Immortality’ (L. Zurbrigg 1982, RE). Being late in the local bloom season, only wine ‘Indian Chief’ offered a remaining glimpse of color. I additionally like the prominent placement of these irises because Zurbrigg was a Region 4 hybridizer and North Carolina resident. These historic were accompanied by a half-barrel pot of multi-colored celosia and a row of yellow snapdragons planted behind the curbside rock border.

Entering the garden by the driveway, four guests passed red, pink, and white peonies on the left. Don Spoon’s bright orange and maroon ‘Go Hokies’ (2018) strategically placed at the junction of the front door walkway and the driveway is an attention-getter each year and this tour was no exception. One young tour goer declared ‘Go Hokies’ his favorite in the garden. Near the front of the house is the iris bed I planted a couple of months after moving into the house, a

◀ ‘Helen Collingwood’  
(K.D. Smith 1949)

collection of historic tall bearded irises passed from the previous generation of my family, including purple and white ‘Helen Collingwood’ (K.D. Smith 1949), yellow ‘Coronation’ (I. Moore 1927), and golden ‘Rocket’ (Mrs. C. Whiting 1945).



‘Absolute Treasure’  
(R. Tasco 2006)

Approaching the back gate at the end of the driveway, guests saw my first-year experiment with growing irises in pots. Several half-barrel pots gave evidence of success including light blue ‘Absolute Treasure’ (R. Tasco 2006) showing off three large blooms on a



Aerial view of the back garden with the public greenway and wetland area visible just beyond the fence

towering stalk. The garden’s location on a cul-de-sac means visitors first see a smaller front yard but upon passing through the back gate are surprised to enter a wide, expansive back garden.

Walking beyond that gate into the larger back garden, blue ‘Codicil’ (S. Innerst 1985), Ginny Spoon’s rose-purple ‘Little Rosie’ (2015), and a few other irises shared space with emerging tiger lilies and just-blooming amaryllis.



‘Little Rosie’ (G. Spoon 2015)



‘Codicil’ (S. Innerst 1985)

## Greenway Garden Retreat (cont.)

Visitors relaxed nearby in Adirondack chairs around the fire pit. Periodic 13-year cicadas began to emerge a week before the tour, and hundreds of them covered leaves, stems, soil—any available surface, really—especially in this area of the back garden.



Petite Monet' (K. Steele 1990)

Turning to the right, tourgoers passed beneath the shade of a tall magnolia tree. On the steps ascending to the deck, white 'Ice Sculpture' (B. Hager 1975) bloomed in a patterned green ceramic pot, a day after receiving a first-place ribbon in the potted division of the spring meeting's iris show. On another

step, Charlotte hybridizer Katharine Steele's 'Petite Monet' (1990) offered its first bloom of the season in a black pot.



A human-figure art piece crafted of metal and rock pointed skyward as visitors proceeded toward the Dykes Medal bed in the center of the yard. This still-growing collection of winners held 25 Dykes specimens at the time of the tour. 'Violet Harmony' (E. Lowry 1952, Dykes Medal 1957) bloomed most generously. Proceeding farther toward the back, a collection of recent releases bloomed, including Colin Campbell's cream-white 'Debra's Melody' (2020), voted winner of the Nearpass Award (best iris observed on tour from a Region 4 hybridizer). Hybridizer and regional vice-president Anita Moran gathered people for an impromptu demonstration of iris pollination. This was my first experience with hybridization, and I'm happy to report that with Anita's capable tutelage a 100% success rate was achieved resulting in the development of four plump seed pods this summer. Even beginners can be successful!



Debra's Melody' (C. Campbell 2020), 2024 Nearpass Award Winner



A long bed across the center of the back garden featured three rows of irises flanking a central line of daylilies. Stepping stones cut across the bed in a raised area I refer to as "Iris Hill", the path lined by a colorful iris assortment including yellow and blue 'Easter Candy' (K. Keppel 2011), yellow and white 'First Interstate' (Schreiner's 1991), and orange and red 'Idol' (J. Ghio 1999). Moving to the right side of the grassy back garden, perhaps the most-



'Idol' (J. Ghio 1999)

photographed view of the day was a large clump of Joe Ghio's 'Starring' (2000) with eight purple and white blooms. It was voted winner of the conference's B. Y. Morrison Award (best out-of-region iris seen on tour). Near the back fence a ring of blue-lavender *Iris pallida* stood in full bloom. Companion plants in the back garden included heirloom petunias, Dutch irises, roses, and evening primrose.



'Starring' (J. Ghio 2000) 2024 B. Y. Morrison Award Winner

Returning to the front garden through a wider gate on the other side of the house, guests discovered a bed of tall bearded irises planted along the west side of the house, stretching their long stalks at an angle toward the afternoon sun. Yellow and white 'Silvergilt' (J.



'Silvergilt' (J. Wills 1960)

Wills 1960) and 'Siva Siva' (J. Gibson 1962) with reddish-brown standards and falls splotched mahogany brown exploded in abundant color. To the left, a small collection of Louisiana irises including red and yellow 'Cajun Sunrise' (J. Mertzweiller 1993) acquired at the 2023 spring regional auction and white and yellow 'Crushed Ice' (H. Pryor 1996/97) were in their first days of bloom.

A few more steps across the fescue front lawn led guests past a bountifully blooming 'White Cap' peony and back to the start. One of the joys of gardening and a primary personal goal in developing Greenway Garden Retreat is having people experience beauty and inspiration through the natural world. I hope that tour guests were able to depart in such a spirit.



CIS member Charisse Miller enjoying the back garden