

**An Engineer by Day and Night**  
*A profile of Al McMurtrie*  
**By Kathleen Garrett**

By day, Al McMurtrie is a Business Information Solutions engineer participating in the development of Real-time Web Interfaces and exploring various portal technologies. By night, however, Al takes on a whole different role – that of an avid and passionate gardener, planting seeds and bulbs by floodlight into the wee hours of the morning. It's all part of his hobby. "A hobby gone overboard," in his own words.

An avid Iris hybridizer for more than 20 years, Al traces the roots of his passion for irises to a 1979 vacation in Switzerland. It was there that he discovered a rainbow of bearded Irises unlike any he'd seen before. This led him to investigate the Canadian Iris Society, where the true breadth of Iris types, colours and origins was revealed to him. He found himself becoming increasingly fascinated with the Reticulata Iris...

As time went by, Al set about hybridizing the Reticulatas he loved so much, hoping to bring some more beauty into the world, and relishing the excitement of watching new things come into bloom. While others settled for standard blue and purple hues, Al constantly strove for more – including genetic material from the wild in his crosses. Although the risk was high that muddy yellow-blue messes would be the result, such was not the fate of Al's hybrids. Vibrant and robust, you can view some for yourself at [www.Reticulatas.com](http://www.Reticulatas.com)

Currently Al makes more than 1000 crosses each year, yielding 10,000 or more seeds. He claims that not a day goes by that he doesn't do something connected with his hobby. His Irises keep leading him toward international pursuits. Al is currently having his hybrids evaluated by Dutch bulb growers and has just started working with a lab in Holland to begin commercial production. While the initial bulbs won't be introduced until 2005 or 2006, he anticipates signing his first commercialization agreement next year.

With hundreds of milestones along the way, not the least of which include: collecting rare and unnamed species in foreign countries, seeing previously unheard-of crosses for the first time, speaking at high-end conferences to fellow enthusiasts, and a proposal to have certain crosses named for him ("x mcmurtriei"), Al has achieved levels of success that most breeders never will.

If you ask Al about his future goals for crossing and inter-crossing, the answer is poetic. "To develop beautiful new colours that were not possible before and that will bloom in your and my garden for years and years to come."

As he will be the first to tell you, Al has opened up a whole new world for Reticulata Irises. And it's a very beautiful world.