

Pollen Storage and Use:

There have been many discussions about how to store and use pollen. I have a technique that I gleaned from Wilma Vallette in her book written on the backs of her Robineers years ago. I also took my numbering system from her. She discusses the use of milk, dried and fresh, and antibiotics along with myriad subjects of as much interest to irisarians today as 40 years ago! Buy it if you can! But, I digress! Pollen can be stored and saved in the refrigerator, and even in the freezer, although not as well there and may last better in the fridge. Right now I am using pollen of late season varieties from last year with early bloomers of this year, even on SDBs and it looks like I'll have takes, although I haven't reached Francelle's magic 10 day point yet.

The BIG secret is to keep it dry and fluffy! To accomplish this, I use a dark brown bottle that had this herbal medicine or something similar in it: <http://www.theherbsplace.com/snx.html> The shape (perfectly round) is important for how I keep it dry. My pharmacist looks at me funny and asks lots of questions, but saves the cannister desiccants that they take out of medicines they are dispensing. They come in several shapes but I use mainly 3 of them. They are pictured here, so you get the idea, in 2 sizes: <http://www.polylam.com/desiccan.htm> In this brown bottle above, I can put in 7 around the edge and one larger one in the middle and wedge them all in tightly with one slightly smaller than a straw. I then add 2 of the largest size as free floaters, so to speak: they are not wedged in but provide extra drying power and are not cumbersome when looking for the capsules.

The next ingredient is the use of "000" gelatin capsules ("00" will work but are too small for my big fingers) (<http://www.developed.net/capsule.htm>). The secret here is to keep them dry, because they will melt and shrivel if gotten wet (messy!) and ruin the pollen. Next, I mark the bottle cap in magic marker with a letter: say A. Each capsule has 4 pin-pricked holes punched in EACH end to provide air circulation, again for drying which is the secret to good pollen. After that, I label with my Sharpie each of 10 capsules per bottle with a code: A1, A2, A3, to A 10. You can add 2 of A2 or 3 of A4, but about 15 capsules per bottle is all the dessicants can handle per bottle! AND EACH capsule can handle only about 6 anthers of pollen!!!! You need a code book. I use a 2 x 3"

flip top notepad. Code the pollen in each capsule in the book: A1=Progressive Attitude, A2=Textronics, etc. Leave notepad in fishing tackle box at all times. I carry one with a drawer in the bottom to hold labeling tags gotten from: <http://www.economylabel.com/> (the rolled tags in 5/8" x 6" size in various colors, I use 4 colors), Sharpie permanent markers (lasts well), tweezers (my big fingers again) and extra capsules in pill bottles for recording crosses, marking tags and saving and labeling pollen. My stud book goes in the top of the tackle box, along with pencils, pens and the brown bottles of pollen. The bottles are stored in the fridge door when not in use during bloom season and the rest of the year. I end up with about 4 or 5 per year and can then make crosses with pollen from last year or this year. It will only keep about one year. As fresh is gathered, the old is thrown out. I apply pollen by grasping either end of it, first one and then other and usually using one per two flowers to lightly spread in on all 6 stigmas. If I only have one flower open and there is pollen left, I put it back in the capsule. I wipe off my fingers and blow out my jar lid and move on. I only make one cross per stalk and strive for 3 pods on each stalk (more and the plant suffers, imo). Gives a good number of seeds from 80-200 and some don't take and some don't germinate. If it's a great cross I might try for 6 pods! Naturally, some pollen will not store for a year for various reasons and will not be usable, but almost all will keep for 6 weeks through bloom season. I have collected pollen from California and brought it home "on a jet plane" ... "I'm leaving .. on a jet plane" .. well that's another story..... "cause I'm not.. but some of ya'll are!" Hope this gives some of you some ideas you might want to try! Gary