

January 2019

TAIS Newsletter

Our 54th year

Tucson Area Iris Society—established 1965

An Affiliate of the American Iris Society



'Babbling Brook'

(Keppel 1965) (Dykes Medal)

Marcusen Sculpture Garden,
Prescott

Photo by Sue Clark, 2018

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President's Message

Happy holidays everybody. Speaking of Christmas presents: I just transplanted 100+ iris seedlings that I started last spring from Rick Tasco's instructions. With work and luck I hope to open some new iris cross-flowering presents in another year. I'm crossing my fingers for something good. I hope everyone has a happy, prosperous, and healthy new year. See you soon.

- Kevin Kartchner

"Nature has undoubtedly mastered the art of winter gardening and even the most experienced gardener can learn from the unrestrained beauty around them."

- Vincent A. Simeone

Upcoming Events

Next meeting: January 12 - Greg Starr's presentation "Madagascar: a World-renowned Island of Megadiversity" begins at 1 PM. Doors open at noon. Mr. Starr is the author of Cool Plants for Hot Gardens and Agaves: Living Sculptures for Landscapes and Containers. Invite your gardening friends! Murphy-Wilmot Branch Library, small room, 530 N Wilmot Rd.

February 9 - Iris breeder Bob Van Liere of Iris4U Gardens in Denver will speak at 1 PM. All are welcome.

Birthday Wishes to:

Maxine Fifer

Kathy Windischman

Bonnie Else

Karen Guss



Hugo van der Goes, 1475,
detail of the Portinari Triptych

Why Irises are called “flags” – the reason revealed, along with some legends

Perhaps you recall your mother or grandmother referring to her irises as “flags.” I do. And some of you have asked me to research why they’re called that. Well, when Dave and I were at the Boyce-Thompson Arboretum this past November, I finally found a reference that explains it.

It seems that royalty selected the iris as a symbol all the way back in the time of ancient Egypt. Pharaohs’ scepters were often adorned with images of irises, with the three petals reported to represent the qualities of faith, wisdom, and valor.

During the Middle Ages, King Clovis of the Franks moved iris lore along in a big way. There are several versions of his legend, all of which have to do with various battles in the sixth century AD. In the first version, an army of Goths had Clovis’ army trapped against the Rhine River near Cologne (in what is modern-day Germany). The king noticed a large swath of yellow-flowered irises growing out into a portion of the river, and realized that the water must be shallow enough there for his troops to cross and escape. In another version, Clovis led his army across the river where a patch of irises grew in the shallows, and they attacked the Goth army from the rear. In yet another version of the legend, represented in the painting at right, an angel appeared to a holy man and explained that the reason that Clovis was forever losing battles was that he simply needed to replace the image of the three black toads on his coat of arms with that of three irises. The angel just happened to have new shield for Clovis, which was bright blue with three irises emblazoned on it. He (or she) gave this to the holy man, who in turn gave it to Queen Clotilde, Clovis’ wife. After she presented it to Clovis, he began winning battles at every turn, and this emblem became his family’s new coat of arms. On [reddit.com](https://www.reddit.com), I read that toads are a pagan symbol, and that the irises represented Clovis’ conversion to Catholicism by baptism.

During the Crusades, King Louis VII of France chose the iris as his family’s symbol and it became known as the *fleur-de-lis*, perhaps as a corruption of “*fleur de Louis*” (flower of Louis). The king had likely heard the legends of Clovis and the irises, and chose to invoke their power and mystery.

Some people claim that irises are known as “flags” because they have appeared on so many flags, banners, and coats of arms, as evidenced by those of Clovis and Louis VII in the story above. While they have certainly appeared on countless flags, a more likely reason is that iris leaves look like reeds, and the Middle English word for reed is “*flagge*.” - SC

Source: [The Secrets of Wildflowers](#), by Jack Sanders, 2014, Lyons Press: Guilford, Connecticut, p. 77-78. Available from [Amazon](#).










Comment nul leig parlon ange enuopa le roys fleurs de lis dor en un esai de faire au roy clovis


Note: The green paint in the image at right may be made from iris petals. See “Did You Know?” on p. 8.




Illustration: 15th-century manuscript illumination of an angel sending the iris shield to Clovis. From the Bedford Hours in the British Library, London, via Wikipedia; found [here](#).

Iris Care in the Arizona Desert – Watering and Soil - summarized from TALS interviews

individual	watering for pots	watering for beds	soil
Kristee	Waters via drip line - the emitters run into the bottoms of her pots, rather than the top, so the water is near the roots and not near the rhizomes. She advises using a moisture meter to determine if the plants need to be watered		Prefers self-watering pots. Adds Soil Moist (polyacrylamide beads) near the bottom of regular pots. Enriches with coffee grounds. For raised beds, she buys the following from Ace Hardware – garden soil, peat, and sometimes perlite and/or vermiculite. Similar mixture for amending beds.
Sue	Waters by hand. Has both self-watering and regular pots. Only the soil gets watered - enough to dampen it, not soak it. Self-watering pots only receive water in their reservoir, not from the top unless it rains. Recently switched to watering only if moisture meter shows less than Wet at the bottom of the pot. Does not yet have watering of irises figured out.	For the bed, she uses a soaker hose (~3/8" diameter) attached to dripline. This is on an automatic timer to water three times a week year-round. Time varies from about 90 minutes in summer to 30 in winter. (Other plants are watered by the same line). This bed was converted to a raised bed in Fall 2018, in the hope that there would be fewer issues with rot.	Miracle-Gro Moisture Control potting soil - over a layer of plastic water bottles if pots are deep and are not of the self-watering variety. Recently trying topping this soil with a 2" layer of cactus mix for drainage purposes. For in-ground beds raised beds, removed half of soil to depth of spade, replaced it with Miracle-Gro planting mix topped with 2" of cactus mix.
Janet	Waters by hand. Has both self-watering and regular pots.		Miracle-Gro potting soil over a layer of rocks at bottom of pots.
Kevin	Some irises receive their water via a dripline and others via sprinklers, both at a fairly slow rate. He mentioned that there are good and bad things about each method. The irises are watered every three days.		Amends his soil with organic matter and a general fertilizer. He buys whatever is on sale, and does not use a specific amount of either, but goes with what seems right for the type of natural soil.

<p>Madeleine</p>		<p>Has four raised beds - watered by a drip system. In the Winter, they receive water once a week, and in the Summer, she supplements their water with a hose, softly spraying along the root area and the edge of the beds each day (just a little bit).</p>	<p>She uses a soil called a “green mix” from Pioneer Landscaping, which is located near I-10 and Twin Peaks Road. This all-natural mix of sandy loam is full of “green stuff” [organic matter] and runs \$32.95/yd with a \$75 delivery charge. www.pioneersand.com. [Note: based on the show and the sale, Madeleine’s irises are HAPPY!!! – SC]</p>
<p>Carol</p>	<p>Pots are all on a drip system. In the summer, they are watered more than in the cooler seasons. They receive water twice a day for 15 minutes, which she thinks may be a bit too much.</p>		<p>Miracle-Gro Moisture Control. When planting, she adds Osmocote (the regular yellow-orange type) to the lower portion of the pot.</p>
<p>Shirley</p>		<p>Beds are watered via a drip line every morning for 20 minutes year round. From May to September, this is supplemented by 15 minutes of watering every evening.</p>	<p>Amends her soil with potting soil and/or peat moss. She adds something to it annually, including worms.</p>
<p>Greta</p>		<p>Prefers watering by hand with a sprinkling can, and is careful to water the bed and <i>not</i> the plants. In the summer, she waters once a week or less. She pokes a teaspoon down into the soil to see how it feels. If it is wet at the bowl part of the spoon, then the plants have adequate water. If not, out comes the sprinkling can!</p>	<p>Improves her iris beds with a bagged soil amendment from Lowe’s whenever she divides a clump of rhizomes, which is on an as-needed basis.</p>

<p>Kathy</p>		<p>Her beds are raised about 4" above the ground level and are bordered by rocks. Watered via a drip line that has holes every 6". In Summer 2017, they got about 30 minutes of water once a week, which she decided is not enough. In the cooler season, she increases the watering to three times a week for about 30 minutes a session. Her reblooming irises are in a separate bed which is watered twice a week year-round. Kathy mentioned that she is experimenting with her watering schedule to get it just right.</p>	<p>She amends the soil in her beds with compost, partly of her own making and partly purchased.</p>
<p>Cathy</p>	<p>Pots get 2 minutes of water daily at 2 PM from adjustable emitters set on slow flow. These are on an independent system with a battery-run timer from a hose faucet. She gave up on growing irises in the beds after Summer 2018, mostly due to grubs and to better performance of irises which had been transferred to pots.</p>	<p>Cathy's watering array and schedule has been adjusted countless times. Her irises were situated along the front edge of 3'-deep raised beds and backed by other plants. Drip lines ran along back of beds, so irises received their water indirectly. Cathy prefers adjustable flow emitters, which she runs for 45 minutes a day during the hot season (2-3 weeks of 100°+ temperatures), drops to 30 minutes a day, and finally to 30 minutes every other day. In 2017-2018, removed all irises from beds due to grubs, and replanted in pots.</p>	<p>Her soil of choice is Miracle-Gro Moisture Control, which she buys seasonally at CostCo.</p>

<p>Pam</p>		<p>Pam's raised beds receive water via a drip line which runs every morning for about 10 minutes. She prefers the adjustable flow emitters. Pam supplements with additional water by hand in the hot season.</p>	<p>Pam's husband created raised beds for her and then filled them with a pick-up truck full of soil mix that he bought at a farmer's market. Pam reports that this soil is fabulous for both irises and vegetables, and that it contains chicken manure.</p>
<p>Diane</p>		<p>Diane's irises grow in the upper tier of a raised bed which has pollinator plants in the lower tier. She started with bubblers, changed to hand watering, and then switched her bubblers to sprayers, which seem to be working well. She waters two to three times per week in the cool season, but waters daily when it gets hot.</p>	<p>Diane bought garden soil from Tank's Green Stuff but added Miracle-Gro soil after realizing that the garden soil did not drain well enough. This mixture seems ideal and she has not changed it in three years.</p>
<p>Bonnie</p>		<p>Watering is accomplished via a drip system. Each plant, including the potted ones, has its own dripper. Bonnie thinks that they are the 1/2 gallon/hour emitters. During the cool season, plants receive water for 15 minutes twice a week. This is upped to daily in the hot season.</p>	<p>Prior to Fall 2018, Bonnie grew irises in pots and in the ground. Then she transferred all of the potted ones to a bed. To get the bed ready, she had to remove 7-8" of caliche and tree roots, which she replaced completely with Miracle-Gro Moisture-Control soil. In her established beds, she amends the soil annually by digging around each iris plant and working in a powder which breaks down the caliche that forms each year.</p>

Treasurer's Report for December - submitted by Martin Juarez, Treasurer

Beginning Balance	\$6762.32
Deposit on 3 Dec	\$53.00
(dues from Melania and Tony, Bonnie, Whitney, Nancy, and Madeleine)	
Balance	\$6815.32

Iris as Pasta!

One type of iris was called “*machaironion*” by the Greeks. Its roots were ground into a flour, and when combined with wheat flour, made into a variety of pasta now known as “macaroni.”

Source: The Secrets of Wildflowers, by Jack Sanders, 2014, Lyons Press: Guilford, Connecticut, p. 77-78. Available from [Amazon](#).

Silver Irises - A state of mind? A metallic suggestion?

It seems that silver irises require a bit more imagination on our part than did copper irises. Some of them seem to be “silver” in name only. Others have a silvery sheen overlying white, lavender, or even blue petals, which ties to this definition from Quera.com: “Silver—a metallic element with the symbol **Ag**. **Ag** is derived from the archaic word for silver, “*argent*.” The appearance is very metallic in lustre and is a very pure white metal.” Must be why so many of the silver irises look white...

The oldest silver iris that I found reference to is *Iris florentina*. This natural hybrid from about 1500 AD is used, along with *Iris pallida* and *Iris germanica*, to make orris root. Orris root has both medicinal and hygienic uses, including expectorants, decongestants, perfumes, soaps, tooth cleansers, and detergents. *Iris florentina* is naturalized throughout many parts of Europe and Asia, as well as grown in gardens and commercial fields worldwide, and it smells like violets.

‘Low Ho Silver’ (Byers 1988) is a popular reblooming Intermediate Bearded iris. Its silvery white petals are accented with light yellow at the hafts. This fragrant beauty blooms from early to late and is available from [Schreiners](#). I bought one at our sale in September because it was recommended as a reliable rebloomer. ‘Silver Skates’ (Roberts 1998) stands out with ruffles, fragrance, silvery-blue standards, and silver falls with a touch of blue at the end of the beards. It blooms mid-season. If you want something newer, ‘Silver Jubilee’ (Hublau 2017) shines with silvery-blue petals and small golden signals on its mid-season blooms. ‘Silver Celebration’ (Van Liere 2018), also a mid-season bloomer, sparkles with its orange-yellow beards on light silvery-lavender petals and a sweet scent. It is available from [Iris4U](#). (Note: Mr. Van Liere will speak at our February meeting).

We sold ‘Ozone Alert’ (Burseen 1997) at our Rhizome Sale this past fall, and Cathy Scire-Pane from our club is now growing it. This ruffled mid-season iris is more pewter gray than silver. You can buy it from [Blue J Iris](#).

Some silvers that I particularly like: ‘Silver City’ (G. Sutton 2003) has white petals with a light orchid-silver cast, red-orange beards which end in lavender horns, and ruffles and lace. It flowers in late mid-season. ‘Silver Dragon’ (Barnard 1997) has heavily-ruffled glittery white petals, white beards tipped in gold with silvery spoons or horns, a light fragrance, and mid-season bloom. ‘Ride the Tiger’ is intriguing with its silver-gray petals rimmed in bronze, and blue-violet beards tipped in bronze. This mid-to-late bloomer is available from [Ross Road Iris](#) (open for orders!). Next month - brass, bronze, and gold! - SC



Top to bottom: ‘Silver Screen,’ ‘Low Ho Silver,’ *Iris florentina*, ‘Silver City,’ and ‘Ride the Tiger,’ all from the AIS Iris Wiki.

TAIS OFFICERS, ETC. FOR 2019

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Tony Kutz - Photographer

Sue Clark - Newsletter Editor & Publisher

What to do in the Iris Garden for January:

Keep area free of leaves, weeds and pests.

Examine the bases of plants for aphids. Carefully squash them by hand or spray with water, insecticidal soap, or diluted dish soap.

Check your drip system to be sure everything is working properly. Fix it or have it fixed while the weather is cool!

Redo any labels that have faded.

Dream about what you want to grow...

**Tip Exchange**

"In Arizona, when you plan to dig, cut water [to] less than 1/2 the regular amount. This will harden or "season" the rhizome so it will stay in good condition while out of the ground. They may stay out of the ground for several months as long as they are stored with air circulation, totally DRY, and reasonably cool (i. e., 85 degrees). DO NOT store bearded iris in the refrigerator!" - from "Bearded Iris Culture - pertains to Tall Bearded, Arilbred, and Median Iris," a flier from Shepard's Iris Garden, Phoenix, Arizona [permanently closed].

Iris Haiku:

Full of potential,
Rhizomes sleep underground,
To awaken in spring.

- Sue Clark



Sydenham Edwards, 1803,
Wikipedia

Iris florentina

Did You Know?

During the Middle Ages, a paint pigment was made from *Iris florentina* (see illustration above) and/or *Iris germanica*. This pigment was called "Iris green," "Verdelis," or "Vert d'iris." Fresh iris petals were steeped in boiling water and combined with alum to produce this clear green paint, which artists and manuscript writers used throughout the 14th and 15th centuries. Both species mentioned above are featured in a still life within a painting by Hugo van der Goes from 1475. The painting, the Portinari Triptych, survives in Florence. See p. 1 of this newsletter for some close-up views of its irises. - SC. Source: Wikipedia.com.

"In the depths of winter I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer."

- Albert Camus

A Little Bit of Botany and Iris History

We continue the story of Bertrand Farr with his noteworthy year of 1912, during which he introduced three "firsts." The first American-bred Siberian iris, 'Grandis,' was a 5-foot-tall violet beauty which became tremendously popular following World War I. The first American-bred spuria iris, 'Miss Tait,' had blue flowers. And the first American-bred tetraploid irises, 'Tromagnifica' and 'Trosuperba,' were in fact, Farr's only tetraploids. Both descend from *Iris trojana*, as evidenced by their names. 'Trosuperba' with its pale blue-violet standards and darker red-violet falls, parented 'Cardinal,' "one of the most important and popular irises of the 20th century," and is found in the parentage of most red irises.

Farr exhibited a garden of over 1500 irises representing hundreds of varieties at the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. This garden won a gold medal, and 'Quaker Lady' secured an Award of Merit there.

Back in Pennsylvania, Farr incorporated his nursery, bought 246 acres of land, and continued hybridizing. One of his most unusual irises, 'Japanesque' (1922), is a tall bearded iris whose flat, open form resembles that of a Japanese iris. The public loved it! Iris-lovers generally hated it.

Bertrand Farr was a charter member of the American Iris Society upon its formation in 1920. He set three goals upon being elected a director: develop an accurate and comprehensive checklist of irises, develop iris test gardens, and create a permanent library. All three have been realized.

Some other Farr "firsts:" he was the first American nurseryman to sell named cultivars of daylilies (and he helped popularize their use in gardens) and his nursery was the first in the US to sell Lemoine double French lilacs, as well as tree peonies. Farr's gardens were believed to contain the largest collection of tree peonies, phlox, pompon chrysanthemums, delphiniums, and oriental poppies in America.

With his lands under increasing pressure of development, Farr sold them and bought 200 acres 12 miles to the west in 1923. He died soon after the move began, though. His Farr Nursery & Landscape Company lives on in Womelsdorf, Pennsylvania [and even has a Groupon!]. - SC

Source: [Classic Irises and the Men and Women Who Created Them](#) by Clarence E. Mahan