

# TAIS Newsletter

Our 55th year

Tucson Area Iris Society—established 1965

An Affiliate of the American Iris Society



**'Bottle Rocket'**  
(M. Sutton, 2009)

Dykes Medal, 2019

Kary Iris Gardens,  
Scottsdale, Arizona

Photo by Sue Clark, 2020

## Acting President's Message

In keeping with this year's "canceled theme" our rhizome sale is deferred until next year. Due to concerns of Harlow's and not wanting to expose any of our members to COVID risk, we've postponed the sale. On the bright side, Adam Ferrell-Wortman, the TBG Horticulturist, will be speaking to us for an August Zoom meeting. I'm really looking forward to hearing from Adam. TBG's iris are some of the best grown that I've seen in Tucson and I expect to learn something new. The photo at right is my favorite mask, made for me by my expert seamstress mother. It makes wearing a mask that much more enjoyable.

- Kevin Kartchner



*"August is the harvest time, crops are ripe and in their prime. Using every scrap of light, farmers work till late at night. As the summer takes its leave, every gnome will now retrieve all the fruits he can obtain for the cold times once again." - unknown*



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## Upcoming Events

**Next meeting: August 8, 1 PM, via Zoom: Adam Farrell-Wortman, horticulturalist at the Tucson Botanical Gardens.**

**~~TAIS Rhizome Sale: September 19th, Harlow's Nursery.~~**

**October 10: 3rd Annual TAIS Photo Contest. \***

**November 14: Potluck. \* \* Pending health guidelines.**

### Birthday Wishes to:

**Dian Curran**

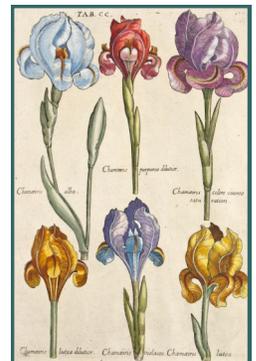
**Miriam Diamond**

**Glenda McCulley**

**Pat Olsen**

**Juliet Westbrook**

**And sending healing thoughts to member Shirley Andrews in Michigan**



Chamaeiris, Michael Valentini, 1719



# An Overview of Biological Classification

Since we talk about genus and species so often, not to mention hybrids, it seems useful to review some biological classification. Organisms with similar traits or genetics are grouped together in various levels. Many organisms that share traits are grouped together in the upper levels of the hierarchy and the groups subsequently narrow to more and more similar and then to unique organisms as we descend through the levels. As far as irises are concerned, W. R. Dykes named his epic book *The Genus Iris*, so we have that term in hand already! Please note that classification often changes as more information becomes available.

**Life:** In general, things that are alive can do the following: move, respire, sense, grow, reproduce, excrete, and feed. The mnemonics Mrs. Gref or Mrs. Ferg are useful for remembering the criteria.

**Domain:** There are three – Bacteria, Archaea or Archaeobacteria, and Eukarya. The latter have cells with a nucleus, so include protists, plants, fungi, and animals. **For an iris, the domain is Eukarya. They are Eukaryotes.**

**Kingdom:** There are various numbers of these, depending on whether the classifier is a splitter or a lumper. Splitters may have 20 or more kingdoms. Five or six are more common: Bacteria, Archaeobacteria, Protocista or Protists, Plants, Fungi, and Animals. The ranking from Kingdom down can be remembered by this mnemonic – King Philip came over for good spaghetti. **For an iris, the Kingdom is Plantae.**

**Phylum:** For plants, the Phyla are often called Divisions. **For an iris, the Division is Magnoliophyta**, the flowering plants or Angiosperms. This is a huge Division with over 300,000 species. Phyla have been replaced by Clades in many recent classification systems, as have all the levels above Order. According to Wikipedia, a **Clade** is a grouping composed of a common ancestor and all of its lineal descendants.

**Class:** This ranking is rarely discussed in botany today.

**Order:** **For an iris, the Order is Asparagales**, which also includes asparagus, onions, garlic, vanilla orchids, daylilies, lilies of the valleys, and *Agapanthus*, to name a few. These had been classified with the Liliales (e. g., lilies, tulips, trilliums, and others), but DNA sequencing has split that group into three.

**Family:** **For iris, the Family is Iridaceae**, which also includes their closest relatives: freesias, gladioli, and crocuses.

**Genus:** Contains one or more species. **For iris, the genus is *Iris***. This is called the generic name and it is always Capitalized and *italicized* or underlined.

**Subgenus:** *Iris* has been further divided into the following subgenera (Dykes referred to them as Sections): *Hermodactyloides* (formerly *Iridodictyum*), *Scorpiris* (formerly *Juno*), *Nepalensis* (Himalayan irises, formerly *Junopsis*), *Xiphium* (formerly *Xiphion*, includes Dutch iris), *Iris* (bearded irises), and *Limniris* (beardless irises). The first four of these are bulbous irises and the latter two are rhizomatous irises.

**Species:** “A species is often defined as the largest group of organisms in which any two individuals of the appropriate sexes or mating types can produce fertile offspring, typically by sexual reproduction” per Wikipedia, which goes on to say there are other ways of defining species, such as by DNA. Species are naturally occurring. They are given a two-part name or binomial. The first part indicates the genus, and the second part, the specific name, indicates the species. These are written in *italics* or underlined. The species part of the name is not capitalized. The type species for iris is *Iris germanica*,\* as defined by Carl Linnaeus. After its initial mention in a document, the genus is generally abbreviated to its first letter, e. g., *I. germanica*. There are over 300 iris species (Wikipedia).

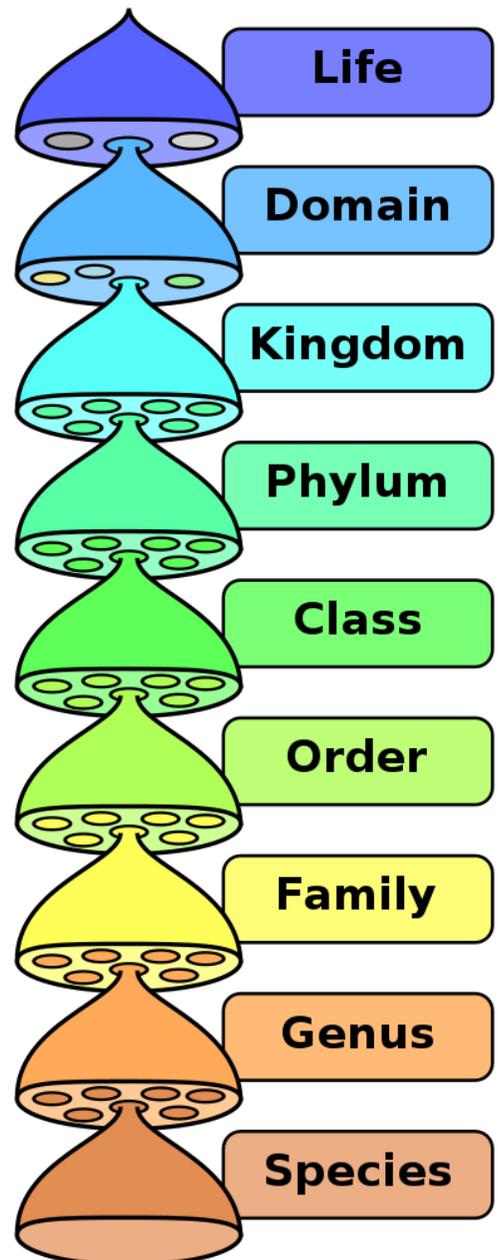


Diagram showing the hierarchy of biological classification, by Pengo/Peter Halasz, 2007. Source for this and most of the information: Wikipedia. Note: Children in Montessori schools begin classification lessons with interest at age six or seven.

\* more on this next month

- SC. Continued on next page...

## Classification, continued...

**Cultivated plant classification goes on from here.**

**Hybrid:** a cross or offspring between different species, genera, or varieties. For irises, hybridization may occur naturally by bees or wind, or may be aided by humans. The resulting iris may have more chromosomes, vigor, frost tolerance, etc. than its parents. If a hybrid forms seeds, the resulting plants will be different than the hybrid. This is often noted as “will not come true from seeds.” Just having a seedpod will drain the plant’s energy, so only allow the seeds to ripen if you intend to grow them. The way to get the named iris hybrid you want is from a division of its rhizome. These will always grow true. Luckily irises are generous and provide their owners with rhizomes galore to share. (We can always hope for that here in the desert!)

**Variety:** “...people might encounter...subspecies and varieties and forms, and these are things like the pink-flowered dogwood, for example, that may occur in nature every so often in a population of white-flowered dogwoods, but stable enough that it gets to be called a form or variety.” – Uli Lorimer in an episode of Margaret Roach’s “A Way to Garden” [podcast](#).

**Selections or cultivars of native plants:** Someone notices an unusual or particularly attractive plant in the wild, collects seeds from it, and after the seeds grow, the plant continues to exhibit the desired trait. The person can name the plant and secure a patent on it.  
– ditto above source - SC

## A Collage of Kevin Kartchner’s First Seedlings



**Immediate left:**  
a collection of  
irises, mostly  
Kevin’s  
seedlings, in a  
vase that he  
designed and  
3-D printed.

### Treasurer's Report for July - submitted by Martin Juarez

Beginning Balance					\$6,063.10
Date	Pd	MOP	Deposits	Expenses	
					<b>NO</b>
					<b>ENTRIES</b>
					<b>FOR</b>
					<b>THE</b>
					<b>MONTH</b>
					<b>OF</b>
					<b>JULY.</b>
					<b>HAPPY</b>
					<b>SUMMER!!!</b>
<b>Sub-Totals</b>			\$0.00	\$0.00	
<b>Ending Balance</b>					\$6,063.10
					7/26/20 13:10
<b>NOTE: Anyone requesting reimbursement for any expense is asked to please submit an original receipt/invoice for auditing purposes (as motioned and passed by the group) in a timely manner. Also, please do not mix/combine personal expenses and group expenses on/in the same transaction/receipt.</b>					



### Tenacity and the Iris

Have you ever seen irises blooming near an abandoned farmhouse or in an old cemetery? Despite all of our trials and tribulations of growing them in the desert, irises are considered tenacious and carefree by people in more temperate climates.

Nancy McDonald related a story about a tough little iris in the Spring 2020 issue of *ROOTS*, the journal of the Historic Iris Preservation Society. She had stored all of the irises for the HIPS annual rhizome sale of 2018 in her basement. In spring 2019, she came across a rhizome as big as her thumbnail, which had somehow fallen unnoticed behind a shelf. On its partial leaf was written a partial name: "Eldor." She felt safe calling it 'Eldorado' (Vilmorin 1910). The rhizome was still firm and had gotten moisture from the damp basement floor during the ten months that it lay lost and hidden. So Nancy potted it and put it on the porch for some sunshine. She had to repot it by midsummer, and after burying the pot in her iris field in the early fall, it grew like a weed.

TAIS member Pam Court told me another tale of tenacious irises when I interviewed her for our January 2018 newsletter. Her in-laws' house was going to be sold, so she dug up many irises from their garden. She gave half of the rhizomes to her daughter who lived in Amarillo, Texas, with instructions *not to plant them too deeply*. Her daughter just sat them on the soil's surface along her fence, and they all bloomed the following spring! How's that for not too deep?! And for tenacity!

Before members of the Prescott Area Iris Society began dividing the historic irises in the Citizen's Cemetery there in 1996, some of them grew in clumps 20' across! These irises in shades of purple and white have now been distributed throughout the cemetery, in beds at the Sharlott Hall Museum in town, and some are sold at PAIS rhizome sales. The cemetery dates to 1864 and was closed in 1933, so those irises spent many decades thriving in their neglect.

About ten years ago when I was an intern in a Montessori toddler program, our irises were dug out in early September as part of an effort to remove some Bermuda grass from their bed. They lay on the ground until Christmas Break, when Dave and I planted them. And most bloomed the following spring! I found similar [tales](#) at houzz.com. One person left some rhizomes out, they froze to the driveway, and they bloomed that year after being planted! One person forgot a box of rhizomes under a tree in the fall and many of these bloomed right in the box when spring arrived! One person in Illinois tossed extra rhizomes over the fence in midsummer and was rewarded with an iris bed full of blooms there in the spring! Do you have a similar story to share? Please send it to me at [taisnewsletter@yahoo.com](mailto:taisnewsletter@yahoo.com). - SC

From top: 'Eldorado' from Iris Wiki, a family plot with irises at Citizen's Cemetery from PAIS, Citizen's Cemetery view, and one of the irises at Greenhouse Montessori School in Gilbert, Arizona (latter two photos by SC).

## TAIS OFFICERS, ETC. FOR 2020

Kevin Kartchner - Acting President

Bonnie Else - Vice President

Sue Clark – Secretary, Signatory on Account

Martin Juarez – Treasurer, Asst. Secretary

Bonnie & Kathy - Programs & Publicity

Joyce & Mary Ann - Hospitality/Door Prizes

Diane Tweedy - Birthday cards

Susan Schaefer - Membership Chairperson

Dave Smith - Photographer

Sue Clark - Newsletter Editor & Publisher

## What to do in the Iris Garden for August:

Keep area free of leaves, weeds and pests.

No need to trim leaves into fan shapes unless you demand that they look tidy through the summer or are replanting the rhizome. Dead leaves help by shading the rhizomes.

Provide afternoon relief with shade cloth or by keeping potted irises in the shade.

Continue to feed and water reblooming irises.

Redo any faded names on plant markers.



## Tip Exchange

Arilbreds should be transplanted every year. Only the new growth should be transplanted. Throw the old rhizomes away.

Rhizomes of tall bearded irises and arilbreds benefit from some drying out between digging and planting. “Well developed rhizomes of tall bearded placed in shady, open and dry places, can remain out of the ground for one to four or more weeks without damage.” Smaller rhizomes “should probably not be held for more than two weeks.” Watch for aphid infestation while rhizomes are out of the ground.

Source: Ben Hagar, Chapter 21 “Culture and Propagation” - Bearded Irises, in [The World of Irises](#)

## Iris Haiku:

Dreaming of coolness,  
My mind travels into spring...  
And irises bloom.

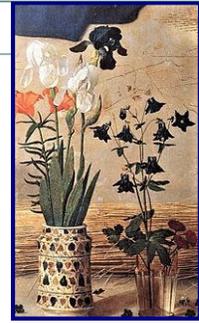
- Sue Clark

## Did You Know?

One of two Sydney Mitchell seedlings that Lloyd Austin used to produce his line of Space Age irises was later introduced as 'Advance Guard' (Mitchell 1945). It was a cross between 'Midwest' and Dykes-winner 'San Francisco' or its sibling. Horns have arisen from Sass seedlings as well as from Mitchell's. Henry Sass recalled horned irises in the Sass seedling beds as early as the 1930's. So the space-age genes may have actually originated there in Nebraska. - Source: Kenneth K. Kidd, Chapter 26 “Iris Genetics” in [The World of Irises](#), 1978, edited by Bee Warburton and Melba Hamblen, p. 412.

"Oh, the summer night Has a smile of light,  
And she sits on a sapphire throne."

- Barry Cornwall, pseudonym of Bryan Waller Procter



detail, Portinari Altarpiece

Source: Wikimedia.com

## A Little Bit of Botany and Iris History

This month, we'll study the iris(es) used to make orris root, one of the favorite commodities of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Information on growing irises and preparing them for orris root appeared in 1304 AD in [Ruralia Commoda](#) by Pietro di Crescenzi, an Italian lawyer and agronomist. This important book, which had been translated into several languages early on, was in 1471 the first agricultural book to be printed by a printing press. In it, di Crescenzi described a white iris to be used in the process. During the 1500's, herbalists and botanists called the plant the “Iris Florentina Orrice or the Florentine Flowerdeluce.” These flowers covered the hills around Florence (and still do).

Hugo van der Goes featured them in his Portinari Triptych, painted between 1474 and 1477. He used the white irises to symbolize Mary's sorrow. (See image, above). Basilius Besler included a colored drawing of the flower in his 1613 book, [Hortus Eystettensis](#) (Garden of Eichstätt). Carl Linnaeus named the white iris *Iris florentina* in 1759 when he described and published it. And Pierre Joseph Redoubt painted a scientifically accurate image of this iris for the masterpiece book, [Les Liliacées](#), published in 1802.

At this point in the story, Mr. Mahan goes on a bit of a rant about the confusion that began and still exists about *I. florentina*. The issues seem to have begun when the British imported the plants from Italy. They received the pure-white *I. florentina* and a white-flowered *I. germanica*, which had a bluish tinge. Whomever goofed on filling that order has caused lots of problems, because the latter iris was the one that survived in the damp English climate, was used to make orris root, and thus came to be known as *I. florentina*. Soon it was described and illustrated in Curtis's Botanical Magazine in 1803 by the magazine's botanist-publisher, J. B. Ker-Gawler. So now two different irises were officially published as *I. florentina*. The story gets complicated further when the Danish botanist Johan Lange called the *I. florentina* that he found growing in Spain *I. albacans* and published it in 1860. And now there were three names! Englishman J. B. Baker reclassified *I. albacans* as a variant of *I. florentina* in his 1892 [Handbook of the Irideae](#). We could have been back to two names, except for W. R. Dykes. Dykes discovered that Linnaeus had made an error in 1759. Although Linnaeus described *I. florentina* accurately, he unfortunately referred to a picture of an iris by Philip Miller which Miller had published as *I. orientalis*, a beardless iris that is likely a form of *I. spuria*. In his 1913 book [The Genus Iris](#), Dykes chose to use the name *I. albacans* because changing it to *I. florentina* “would only lead to confusion.” It is here that Mr. Mahan really goes into a rant, because the flower had been known as *I. florentina* since at least the early 1300's by everyone except Mr. Ker-Gawler and Mr. Lange, not to mention being accurately described by Linnaeus! Mr. Mahan seems to suggest that Dykes chose the name which had been published by his fellow-Englishman, Mr. Ker-Gawler. Dykes also demoted the true *I. florentina* to non-species rank, calling it *I. germanica* var. ‘Florentina.’ Mr. Mahan indicates that the taxonomic rule of priority should have been used here and that the Florentine iris famous for centuries should be called *Iris florentina* as it always had been! Ferdinand Cayeux introduced a lovely white and purple iris called ‘Florentine’ in 1937, although the registrar disapproved this name. No wonder! What's in a name indeed?! - SC  
Source: [Classic Irises and the Men and Women Who Created Them](#) by Clarence E. Mahan