

# TAIS Newsletter

Our 55th year

Tucson Area Iris Society—established 1965

An Affiliate of the American Iris Society



**'Come Undone'**  
(Burseen, 2015)

Kary Iris Garden,  
Scottsdale, Arizona

Photo by Sue Clark, 2020

## Acting President's Message

Zoom, zoom. It was great to see those who appeared for our first virtual TAIS meeting via Zoom. It's been too long. Hosting a Zoom meeting was a first for me and now we're ready for the next one. We went around the virtual room sharing how we grow our iris to survive through what to me is the most challenging of iris seasons: summer in the desert. Thanks to Sue Clark for suggesting the meeting. I'm still hopeful we can have a safe rhizome auction in August and sale in September. Be well everybody.

- Kevin Kartchner

*"What is one to say about June, the time of perfect young summer, the fulfillment of the promise of the earlier months, and with as yet no sign to remind one that its fresh young beauty will ever fade." – Gertrude Jekyll*

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## Upcoming Events

**Next meeting: Auction - August 8, 1 PM at the Tucson Botanical Gardens. Pending health guidelines and reopening of the Gardens.**

**PAIS Iris Sale: Saturday, July 25th, 2020, 10 AM to 3 PM, Prescott. See their [website](#). Pending health guidelines.**

**TAIS Rhizome Sale: September 19 at Harlow's Gardens. Pending health guidelines.**

### Birthday Wishes to:

**Diane Tweedy      Olive Mondello**

**Christy Lewalski**

**Remembrance: Long-time TAIS member Ruth Cely passed away at age 97 in May. [Thank you to Sam for the information].**



Basil Besler, TB Garden Irises 1613



## TAIS May Meeting - via Zoom

Ten members attended our first-ever Zoom meeting on May 16. Business first: We still hope to hold our auction on August 8, which Kevin suggested could be held outdoors if TBG (Tucson Botanical Gardens) is still closed. We can use some of the order of Club irises that Sue recently made with Thomas Johnson of Mid-America Gardens if the rhizomes from Region 15 do not arrive in time. Rhizomes have also been ordered for our sale on September 19.

### Today's topic - Helping our Irises Survive the Summer

#### ☼ Shade

Tony - has built a framework of PVC pipe to support shade cloth over his raised beds. On the sunny end of the bed, there is green shade cloth and on the end with the mesquite tree nearby, black shade cloth. He thinks that these are 60% and 30%, respectfully. Corrugated cardboard (from boxes) is propped against the pots as a sun shield. Other pots are clustered under a canopy (new this year). Because these are along a south-facing wall, a tarp for shade hangs like a curtain from the side of the canopy which is parallel to the wall. Tony puts the screening up when the temperature rises into the 90°s and removes it in about August after the monsoon passes. Following that, he relocates pots as needed into more or less shade, depending on the condition of the plant. He notes that irises that only receive morning sun are fine, but those receiving the hot afternoon sun need our assistance. Their only rebloomer, 'Blackalicious,' blooms under the shade cloth. It blooms early and often.

Kevin - used shade cloth for the first time last summer. He bought the 30% kind, but his light meter reading suggested that it was more like 60%. He had his worst bloom season ever this spring. Correlation, perhaps?

Sue and Dave - moved their pots into the shade as soon as it got hot (or just past that since it went up to 105° in April causing the loss of some irises. We were too slow...). Some are along the west side of our house because they are shaded for much of the day there by our huge eucalyptus tree. The others are clustered on the north side of the house. They receive total shade until late in the afternoon when they end up in full sun. This is less than ideal because the space has walls on three sides and it heats up. But it is the best available option, so they are there from about April into mid-November (or whenever the temps are below about 95° and it is cooler at night).

Sally - her irises that do best are the northeast side of the house and get morning sun only. These are planted in the ground. Her other raised bed faces south and she is trying shade cloth this summer to see if that will help them. She reported that she kept her rhizomes in the refrigerator crisper last summer out of frustration, but unfortunately did not keep track of which ones they were, so she cannot report on the results. She read something about keeping them away from apples in the fridge.

Kathleen - is in a new house this year. A mesquite tree shades one end of her iris bed, and the plants there, although quite healthy-looking, did not bloom. The ones on the sunny end of this bed did.

#### ☼ Summer Watering Regimen

Tony - waters every 2-3 days, enough to get water to the roots, but not to make the rhizome rot.

Kathleen - cuts back on watering.

Madeleine - supplements water from her drip line during the summer, using a hose and wand in the early mornings. Whenever it get above 110°, she waters at night as well.

#### ☼ Summer Fertilizing Regimen

Tony - fertilizes every week and a half with Fertilome.

Kathleen - fertilizes once after bloom is done and then not again till fall. She reported that TBG uses fish emulsion and other organic fertilizers on their irises.

Joyce - fertilizes rebloomers once a week in the summer. She alternates between Super Bloom-type fertilizers.

Madeleine - is fertilizing more this year. Following the end of bloom, she lightly scratches in a tablespoon of Triple Super Phosphate for the plants to use through the summer. She also doses them with liquid kelp (or some other good buy of organic fertilizer) every two weeks using her sprinkling can. She prefers organic fertilizers.

#### ☼ Soil and Soil Additives

Tony - has noticed that potting soil gets dense and compacted after one year. What to do?

Kathleen - adds vermiculite and regular dirt

Kevin - adds perlite to commercial potting mix

Joyce - the Master Gardeners tell people that potting soil is formulated for the Midwest, so we Westerners should mix in perlite or pumice at a rate of 1/4 to 1/3 of the volume. They also discourage the use and extra expense of moisture-control potting soil, citing studies by two universities. She recommended EcoGro on St. Mary's Road for pumice and perlite, as well as for unusual plants and vegetables. They also make and sell their own potting mixes. Mesquite Valley Growers and Harlow's usually carry pumice and perlite, too.

Kevin - has purchased pumice and perlite at Lowe's or Home Depot before.

Kathleen - bought a big bag of perlite for about \$14 at Home Depot, she thinks.

Madeleine - replenished the soil in her raised beds this past fall by adding perlite or pumice, coir (coconut fiber - mix it with water), and compost. These materials help water drain from the soil.

☼ **Compost and Soil Replenishment**

Sally - has success with a barrel-type compost bin. She does not have to add much water. Every few years, she removes all the irises in her raised beds, adds compost to supplement the soil, and then replants.

Joyce - it often takes a lot of water to make compost.

Sue - reported that Gordon Jensen added topsoil to a section of his beds each year - same process as Sally uses. Gordon said that the organic matter in the beds breaks down, so the soil level sinks and requires replenishment.

☼ **To Mulch or Not to Mulch**

Kathleen - although mulching is not recommended for irises, TBG covers their iris beds with about 3" of crushed pecan shell mulch and their irises look super!

Pat (a new member who currently lives near Chicago) - mulches with pine needles since they dry quickly.

☼ **Leaves with Brown Tips**

Sue - these are a natural part of summer, probably due to the heat. Someone told her not to cut them below this because the brown portion will keep moving down the leaf. It is ok to clip off just the brown part, although dead leaves and these brown tips do help shade the rest of the leaves. So leave them unless they drive you nuts.

Madeleine - the brown tips are from radiant heat.

☼ **Rodent Issues**

Joyce - ground squirrels and pack rats did mischievous deeds such as digging up rhizomes, taking bites of rhizomes, and stealing name tags. When she lived in Charlotte for a few years, voles stole rhizomes, bulbs, and whole plants. When she moved back to Tucson, she planted her irises in stock tanks.

Kevin - mentioned that pack rats and gophers have eaten his rhizomes at times.

Madeleine - has found that watering the whole bed keeps chipmunks from digging holes in it to bury nuts.

☼ **Spider issues**

Tony - has lots of spider webs. Any ideas?

Sue - removes some webs using a stick if they are where she doesn't want them; otherwise leaves them alone. Unless they are from black widows who sometimes decide to live in the spouts of the self-watering pots...

☼ **Placement Problems**

Joyce - her irises in stock tanks were planted a bit late and are in dappled light. Only two bloomed this year out of 15-20 plants.

Madeleine - moved two failing rose bushes last fall and they perked up quickly.

Kevin - his 'Scoonchee' iris thrived after being relocated to a place it preferred.

☼ **Successes**

Madeleine - all of her irises but two bloomed this year! And even those two had large and healthy leaves.

Sally - has a bee-pollinated seed pod on an iris. She plans to grow the seeds.

Kevin - his seedlings are doing super. Some bloomed early and others are just finishing up now! Their stems are 3-4' tall and had lots of blooms. Their rhizomes are rather tightly packed, which he thinks might keep them a bit cooler. In addition, they are growing in a bed that has been empty for about five years.

Pat - showed some views of her yard with 300+ irises. Blooming currently are standard dwarf bearded and median dwarf bearded. She just plants and they grow!

Tony - showed his shade set ups.

☼ **Excess Rhizome Problems**

Sally - has thrown rhizomes away. Interested in trading.

Kevin - donate them to our Sale and receive Iris Bucks in trade so you can buy some new varieties.

Joyce - Master Gardeners will accept all rhizomes, which they will pot up for their sales.

☼ **Request**

Someone asked if we could hold other Zoom meetings, perhaps to see more of Pat's irises in a few weeks!

**Thank you** to Kevin for figuring out how to host a meeting on Zoom and then hosting this one, and to Sally for suggesting the topic! - SC

**Left: most of the attendees enjoying a virtual tour of Pat's iris garden near Chicago at the end of the Zoom meeting. Not visible are Pat, Dave, and Jim. Photo by SC.**



# TAIS Virtual Iris Show 2020, Irises from H to NOID 1



'Heat is On,' 'High Desert,' 'Ice Cream Sundae,' 'Ice Cream Sundae'



'Illusionist,' *Iris pallida*, 'Irresistible Charm,' 'Kathy Chilton'



'Kathy Chilton,' 'Kathy's Carnival,' 'Kathy's Carnival,' 'Kathy's Carnival' (all named for our member, Kathy Chilton!)



'Kiosk' (AB) [arilbred iris], 'Kiosk' (AB), 'Lacy Susan,' 'Lady Friend'



'Lion King' (JI), 'Loyalty' (JI) [both Japanese iris], 'Mango Queen,' 'Margie'



'Mary McClellan' (AB), 'Midnight Cry,' 'Midnight Kitty' & 'Midnight Kitty' (these tied for 2nd place)



'Mixed Signals' (tied for 3rd place), 'Molokini,' 'Monday Morning Blues,' 'Music of the Surf'



'Mystic Image,' 'New Found Glory,' 'New Found Glory,' 'New Found Glory' with a bee and a bug visiting



'Night Moves,' 'Night Moves,' 'Night Moves,' NOID 1

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

| Beginning Balance  |    |     |          |          | \$6,067.34 |  |
|--|----|-----|----------|----------|------------|--|
| Date   | Pd | MOP | Deposits | Expenses |            |  |
| 18-May   | X  |     | \$20.00  |          |            | Dues - O'Rourke #111,<br>Lewalski-Gordon #1214 |
| Sub-Totals   |    |     | \$20.00  | \$0.00   |            |  |
| Ending Balance   |    |     |          |          | \$6,087.34 | 5/20/20 9:24                                   |
| <p><b>NOTE:</b> 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.</p> |    |     |          |          |            |  |

## Iris Foliage, Part I: Original and Variegated

Now that we have completed our look at colors, patterns, and forms, we'll take a peek at iris foliage. Bearded iris leaves generally come in a lovely bluish green, which in combination with their lance-like shape gives them a strong presence in the garden even when the plant is not blooming. The leaves are covered with a waxy substance familiarly known as "bloom" and technically known as [epicuticular wax](#). This wax is made of hydrophobic [water-repelling] organic molecules and it serves several purposes: to decrease moisture loss, reflect ultraviolet light, and to present an anti-climb surface, per Wikipedia. Some [hostas](#) have this same coating and bluish color, as do blueberries, plums, and poppy pods. One summer my mom's and sister's blue hostas turned green, so we researched what could have caused this and found that excessive rain can wash away the waxy coating. This glaucous veneer can be rubbed off with one's fingers, which is good to know when labeling iris leaves during division or for our Rhizome Sale. Rubbing it away makes the Sharpie markers last longer since they don't clog up with wax so quickly. You may have noticed that some of the waxy layer rubs off when you slide your fingers up the leaves to remove aphids, or when you handle stems on the way to a show. Irisarians often use talcum powder to hide these spots on show stems, and this is quite effective.

Some irises have variegated leaves, most likely caused by a random genetic mutation according to irisarian and horticulturalist Kelly Norris. He notes that most of them are clones of *Iris pallida*. These are grown for their unique foliage - their flowers are droopy and pale in comparison with today's modern iris forms. Some *I. pallida* cultivars have cream and green striped leaves and others have yellow or gold and green striped foliage. The Wisconsin Master Gardener website notes that the yellow/gold-striped types look especially striking when planted next to plants with purple leaves (see photo). [Try heuchera ['Forever Purple'](#) or ['Palace Purple'](#)]. In Lloyd Austin's 1961 catalog, he suggested that variegated iris foliage would be a stand-out in both flower arrangements and corsages, as well as a striking edging for a garden.

Brad and Kathie Kasperek of Zebra Gardens in Utah have devoted a portion of their breeding efforts to improving the flowers of irises with variegated leaves. Most are crosses with a variegated-foliage seedling from Allan Ensminger. Norris states that "the only way to transmit variegation to seedlings is maternally..." indicating that the pod parent must be variegated rather than the pollen parent. He recommends the Kaspereks' ['Zebra Bluez'](#) (2004) (see photo at right) and ['Neglected Zebra'](#) (2007), in two shades of purple. Other Kasperek irises with variegated foliage include ['Zebra Night'](#) (1996), a royal purple self with orange beards; ['Zebra Blush'](#) (1993), a yellow and rosy purple bitone which blooms in early to mid-season (see photo); ['Zebra Halo'](#) (1996), a buttery yellow self; ['Zebra Jam'](#) (2001) which is lacy in red violet; ['Zebra Milk'](#) (2001), a white self; and ['Zebra Perp'](#) (2012), a violet-purple self.

Other hybridizers have made strides in this type of iris, and Norris recommends the following cultivars: ['Canadian Streaker'](#) (Chapman 1997), a light blue self; ['Fantastreaks'](#) (Jedlicka 2007), a lacy white self; ['Quite the Same'](#) (Ensminger 2002), a lovely ruffled white and violet amoena; and ['Verdict'](#) (Johnson 2004), a ruffly orchid-purple self with orange beards and a pronounced sweet fragrance. Johnson's ['Striptease'](#) (2012) is touted as "one of the best variegated foliage iris yet!" 'Canadian Streaker' has both variegated and purple-based foliage.

Next month, we'll look at purple-based foliage. - SC



From top: *Iris pallida* 'Argentea Variegata' and 'Aurea-variegata' in bud [with purple heuchera] (from Wisconsin Master Gardener website), 'Zebra Bluez' and 'Zebra Blush' (from Iris Wiki).

## 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 (temporary)

Susan Schaefer - Membership Chairperson

Dave Smith - Photographer

Sue Clark - Newsletter Editor & Publisher

## Iris Limerick:

If you feel sad and blue,  
Think of a favorite iris or two.  
Just picture a bloom  
And you'll feel better soon -  
Our flowers help carry us through.  
- Sue Clark



*I. albispirtus*

## Did You Know?

Lloyd Austin advertised one iris as a **HORROR** in his 1961 catalog. Why? Because it was excellent for hybridizing but apparently *not* for admiring. 'Sharksiana' BB (Roberts 1959) was a cross between 'Sharkskin' (TB) and *Iris susiana*, an *Oncocyclus*, giving it 44 chromosomes. And unlike many such crosses, this one easily sets seed. 'Sharksiana' grows well with TBs. It really doesn't sound like a horror, but the Iris Wiki has a quote from the April 1959 AIS Bulletin 153 describing it as "Not a garden flower." It debuted that year at \$15. Mr. Austin described 'Sharksiana' in his catalog as 14" tall with pleasing-arched white standards and narrow white falls with chartreuse and purple touches. - SC

"More than anything I must have flowers,  
always, always. - Claude Monet 

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

Move potted irises into shade for the summer if you have not already.

Spring bloomers need fertilizer for 6-10 weeks after last bloom (until late June). Be careful that they do not receive overhead water, or they are likely to rot. It is best to water in the evening.

Reblooming irises need water and fertilizer through the summer, or they will not bloom in the fall.

Keep area free of leaves, weeds and pests.



## Tip Exchange

The tonic [Great Big Plants](#) has really helped my houseplants thrive. I have started using it for my once-a-week waterings. It is also good for other plants, including irises. Give them a dose in the fall. - SC

White Flower Farms has some lovely ornamental garden [stakes](#) in their new catalog. They don't offer an iris, but the poppy pod stake is on my Wish list! - SC

Instead of just moving the big pot with our last iris bud into the shade, I should have cut the stem and brought it inside because the bud just dried up in the heat. - SC

## A Little Bit of Botany and Iris History

John K. Small, long-time head curator of the New York Botanical Garden, received several reports during the 1920's of exquisitely-shaped white irises growing in the area of the Caloosahatchee River in southwest Florida (see illustration above). Those who saw them called them "ghost irises," because they seemed to hover in the air if one were looking at them from any distance. These ghost irises grew in ponds and prairies along the river's route. Small's first thought was that they must be an albino form of *Iris savannarum*, which he had described and named in 1925.

The white irises bloom early in the season and Small was unable to make a trip to collect any of them. So in 1924 he asked Walter M. Buswell, a naturalist who lived in nearby Fort Meyers, Florida, to gather some of the plants for him. Buswell managed to find and secure both rootstocks and seed pods of the ghost iris in 1927 and sent them to Small in New York, who planted several dozen of them (and probably crossed his fingers!). Approximately six of them bloomed that October. Small noted that the flowers were different from those of *I. savannarum*. He considered it a new species, named it *I. albispirtus*, and published it in the 1929 edition of the NYBG's [Addisonia](#) journal. Both species have six-ribbed pods, and Small hypothesized that they had a common ancestor in the ancient highlands of the country.

Not everyone agrees that *I. albispirtus* is a separate species, though. The [ITIS \[Integrated Taxonomic Information System\] Standard Report](#) lists it as a synonym of *I. savannarum* (even though the discoverer of both said that it definitely *is not!*). Author Clarence E. Mahan continued the story of the ghost iris in his book. Small's plantings have disappeared from the NYBG, the Caloosahatchee River area has been developed and altered forever. But in 1996, Robert Turley registered '[Cass White](#),' which he believes is a clone of the ghost iris. Michael Gideon, the Florida irisarian whom I mentioned last month, has discovered *I. albispirtus* growing in several locations in the wild. Mr. Mahan and others fear that the ghost irises, without the protection offered by a species status, will disappear: a species can attain "endangered species" status, while a nonspecies cannot.

Source: [Classic Irises and the Men and Women Who Created Them](#) by Clarence E. Mahan, ITIS website, and an [article](#) on the AIS Iris Wiki.