

TAIS Newsletter

Our 55th year

Tucson Area Iris Society—established 1965

An Affiliate of the American Iris Society



Acting President's Message

We had a great dig of Kristee's rhizomes. Most of us ended up with a dozen or more very nice ones. More than the iris, it was so nice to see some of everyone's faces for the first time in six months. Thanks again, Kristee.

The photo contest is going to be tight as always. Some of Tom Johnson's new introductions will be awarded. Don't miss the results to be announced at our October Zoom meeting. We'll also be electing our board members for 2021 so join our dedicated volunteers.

We're contemplating an outdoor potluck for November. What do you think?

- Kevin Kartchner

'Magical'
(Ghio 2007)

Kary Iris Gardens
Scottsdale, Arizona

Photo by Sue Clark, 2020

"October gave a party; The leaves by hundreds came - The Chestnuts, Oaks, and Maples, And leaves of every name. The Sunshine spread a carpet, And everything was grand, Miss Weather led the dancing, Professor Wind the band."



- George Cooper, October's Party

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Upcoming Events

October 1: Deadline for voting in the Photo Contest. Website.

Next meeting: October 10, 1 PM via Zoom. Photo Contest entries and winners. Officers, plans.

November 14 Potluck: may be in Bonnie's yard.

Birthday Wishes to:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Jeff Atkinson | Linda Briggs | John Scire |
| Melania Kutz | | Tony Kutz |
| Pam McConaughy | | Maryann Albano |
| Lucille Skerston | | Wanda Bentley |
| Faith Holland | | Sally Vega |



Iris germanica, Wm. Curtis magazine

Kristee's Dig

We  Irises

12 Sept 2020 - Twelve TAIS members gathered at beautiful Desert Meadows Park in Green Valley for our first event of the pandemic! Fellow member Kristee West was retiring her plot in the Community Garden there, and offered 130+ rhizomes to those in our club. Some people brought seeds and rhizomes to trade. Everybody went home happy!



Photos by
Dave Smith

Choose five!
Ready, set, go!



Pecan mulch

We're on the web!
Tucsoniris.org



The Organic Materials that Adam Mentioned and a Bit More About Them

Adam Ferrell-Wortman, horticulturalist at the Tucson Botanical Gardens, spoke to us last month about his methods for growing those wonderful-looking irises at TBG. He uses several organic materials to achieve those results.

Organic substances are not a quick fix, as they decompose slowly (think one year) and equally slowly release their chemical compounds to the soil. They improve the soil's structure as they do this, though.

Blood Meal: (12-0-0) Contains slow-release nitrogen which helps plants grow more lush and green. It also raises the acid level of soil. Apply according to directions, as it is concentrated. Downside: it can attract dogs and other carnivores. Try alfalfa meal if that is an issue. I bought a bag of blood meal at a nearby nursery. The meal looks a bit like coffee grounds. The bag has no instructions on timing, but says to wash it off of leaves.

Bone Meal: (0-10-0) Adds phosphorous which helps plants grow and flower, as well as develop sturdy roots. Consider wearing a mask when applying this dusty and powdery material. It has been boiled so cannot give one mad cow disease. I bought mine at a nursery. On the bag it says to apply it in the spring and in the fall.

Feather Meal: (12-0-0) Contains slow-release nitrogen to ensure growth of foliage and flowers. Incorporate while planting or apply as a side-dressing. Mine is from a nursery. The package recommends monthly application. It looks like sawdust & smells like a chicken coop.

Humic Acid: Helps improve soil by adding organic matter (carbon) and aids metabolism by allowing plants to take in more nutrients. Another advantage is that plants can grow deeper roots. It is available in granular and concentrated liquid forms. Humic acid is typically mined from lignite (brown coal) and leonardite (a mineraloid that occurs with lignite). It can also be derived from compost at home. I bought a [concentrated bottle](#) of it on Amazon, and mixed it with water in a gallon jug. On the bottle, it says to apply as often as desired.

Fish Emulsion: (4-1-1 or 3-3-0.3) Contains nitrogen along with trace minerals and micronutrients derived from fish. Besides helping plants develop a healthy root system, it can be used as a foliar feed and a compost starter. Fish emulsion must be diluted with water and the label says to not mix more than can be used during watering - in other words, *do not* store diluted fish emulsion. I [bought mine](#) on Amazon. Dosing instructions say to use every two weeks on outdoor plants.

Both fish emulsion and humic acid can improve soil quality in an established bed without digging it up, Adam told us, because they percolate down through the soil.

Mycorrhiza: In the symbiotic relationship known as mycorrhiza, a plant supplies materials created by photosynthesis (such as sugars) to a fungus attached to its roots. The fungus aids the plant by helping it take up nutrients (such as phosphorus) as well as water. Available at [Amazon](#) and nurseries. Adam did not mention using Mycorrhizal fungi with irises, but other plants.

Greensand: Used in gardens since the 1700's, it improves soil structure. If soil is sandy, adding greensand can make it drain more slowly. Adding it to clay soil loosens the soil so that water can drain more quickly. Greensand improves plant vigor. It is mined, mostly in New Jersey, and consists of glauconite, a micaeous mineral. Greensand is rich in potassium, iron, and 30+ trace minerals, which it releases slowly. Apply spring & fall. Buy it at Walmart or at nurseries.

Pecan Mulch: This lightweight material is made of pecan shells and it helps neutralize our alkaline soil and water. Although it is lightweight, it will not blow away since the shells interlock. It supplies important nutrients such as iron, sulfate, phosphate, zinc, copper, and manganese, which are released slowly as the shells decompose. You can likely get a truckload of it for free at pecan growers near Tucson and [Green Valley](#) or purchase some at [Acme Sand & Gravel](#), 7777 E 22nd Street, Building 3. Using this material prevents it from going to a landfill.

Wood Chip Mulch: I needed a substitute for pecan mulch since it is not available in the Chandler area - my friend Jane called eight local nurseries and landscape material businesses with no luck. Adam suggested wood chip mulch as an alternative for us. I bought some at Lowe's. They have it in brown or red colors. Watch for it to be on sale. - SC

Sources: [Gardening Know How.com](#), [Morning Chores.com](#), Wikipedia, [Homeguides](#), [SFGate](#) and the packages of these materials that I purchased.

Treasurer's Report for September - submitted by Martin Juarez

Beginning Balance					\$5,586.90	
Date	Pd	MOP	Deposits	Expenses		
25-Sep			\$30.00			DUES
Hatounian #1662, Kelly #309, Briggs #1191						
25-Sep			\$130.00			Kristee's Iris Dig
(Pane-Scire \$50, Clark/Smith \$40, Windischman \$20, Wilcoxon \$20)						
Sub-Totals			\$160.00	\$0.00		
Ending Balance					\$5,746.90	9/25/20 9:14
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.						

Species Iris, Part II: Japanese Irises

All Japanese irises descend from a single species, *Iris ensata*. This hardy plant is found throughout Japan, northern China, and in the easternmost portion of Russia. It can withstand both sub-zero temperatures and deep snow cover for several months. *I. ensata*'s natural habitat is boggy areas with acidic and richly-organic soils. Oftentimes they live in shallow standing water for much of the year. Japanese irises are beardless and bloom about a month after tall bearded. Their flattish blossoms resemble large butterflies from a distance and their leaves are distinguished from most other irises by having a midrib. The finger-like rhizomes are covered in fibers and grow in a fairly upright fashion. The roots must be kept moist.

There is much natural variation in *I. ensata*, which inspired people to try their hand at "improving" it during the last 800 years. In 1694, eight varieties were described in a book, and by 1799, there were hundreds of varieties, many of which were bred by Sadamoto Matsudaira and his father Sadahiro. Legend has it that the father hybridized irises with double flowers only four generations after cultivating seeds from the wild species. Sadamoto was later known as Sho-o, or "Old Man of the Irises."

There are three types of Japanese iris according to the traditional Japanese system. Ise types developed near Kyoto after 1800. They were treated almost as pets - potted plants were brought indoors just before flowering, and watching their perfectly-formed single flowers open was revered as a time of reflection and relaxation. The Edo types were bred as garden plants, and their branched stems are taller than their leaves. They may have single or double flowers. The Higo types were bred from Edo types after 1860 for cultivation in pots. Their blooms, which can be 12" across, hold their ruffled, overlapping falls horizontally.

Japanese irises typically occur in blues and purples, and occasionally in white or pink. Dr. Currier McEwen introduced tetraploidy into the line in 1960 using colchicine, an anti-gout drug. In his 1990 book, [The Japanese Iris](#), he tells of how this type of iris became all the rage in America after the Civil War, which coincided with the opening of Japan to outsiders. After a flurry of planting and hybridizing, 19th-century Americans eventually lost interest, which he believes was due to a lack of knowledge of the conditions this iris needs to thrive.

Locally, Adam Ferrell-Wortman grows Japanese irises beside a fountain in the Tucson Botanical Gardens and TAIS member Terry Swartz grows six varieties of them in his garden. Terry graciously composed all of his tips into an article for us - see it on the following page. He included some general garden tips, as well. Consider giving some of these beautiful irises a try! - SC

Sources: [The Gardener's Iris Book](#) by William Shear, 1998, Taunton Press: Newtown, Connecticut, and [The Gardener's Guide to Growing Irises](#) by Geoff Stebbings, 1997, Timber Press: Portland, Oregon. See the following page and the Society for Japanese Iris [website](#) for more information.



Some Japanese iris hybrids: 'Reign of Glory,' 'Diomedes,' 'Persephone,' 'Snook,' 'Christina's Sister,' and 'Japanese Harmony,' all from the AIS Iris Wiki.

Growing Japanese Irises in Tucson

by TAIS member Terry Swartz

You can grow Japanese iris in the desert, but there are a few things you should be aware of as far as their growing requirements.

If you want to try Japanese Iris, I recommend [Ensata Gardens](#) from Michigan as an excellent source for purchasing iris. It's best to plant Japanese iris in the fall to allow them to establish during our cooler months, letting them grow enough root-mass to survive our increasingly hot summers. In their first winter here in the desert, you can cover them as protection from a hard freeze if they are small and still tender. Once the plant is mature, the colder the better! Helps them bloom in the spring!

I plant my rhizomes in large plastic pots, one rhizome clump per pot, minimum 24" diameter. You will need one drain hole at the bottom, which I cover with a patch of window screen to slow down soil from rinsing out the bottom of the pot during watering. I place 6" of composted steer manure at the bottom of the pot, then fill pot with a soil mix of one third peat moss, one third compost, and one third cactus mix. Your iris will tolerate standing in water, but should have some drainage. Put a thick mulch on the top of your planting. Mulching is vital! Treat them like Louisiana iris. Never let them dry out or you will lose the plant. When I receive my iris, I keep them in a bucket of water until I am ready to plant.

My iris are planted beneath my Ash tree and up on bricks to prevent tree root invasion. The tree sheds its leaves in winter, allowing my iris to absorb the weak winter sun, and provides them shade during scorching hot summers. The Ash tree really likes the extra water too from all the iris pots under its canopy.

Japanese iris will not bloom if your area does not get cold enough during winter time. For instance, Japanese iris will grow in Florida, but they will not ever bloom there unless they get an unusually cold winter. Luckily, my garden is in a low spot in the Tucson area,

and my Japanese iris benefit from a couple of hard freezes, as do my roses and other iris. Only the citrus trees get any frost protection in my garden, everything else is on its own.

In mid-January I give my established Japanese iris a haircut, shearing away the tops to about six inches high and cleaning up the spent leaves. It's really just a general cleanup and might not be necessary but it looks tidier and more satisfying for me.

These iris are heavy feeders, and seem to like whatever you throw their way as far as food goes. At the beginning of February, I begin feeding them the same stuff I give my roses: a good handful each of [fish meal](#), [alfalfa meal](#), [epsom salts](#), [Osmocote](#), and [Milorganite](#) at the start. At the end of February I will begin feeding once a week the following: one week [Magnum Gro](#), which is a water soluble feed, and the next week [fish emulsion](#), and so on. Japanese iris tend to bloom later than tall bearded iris, usually at the end of April and up until early June. Remember, most fertilizers contain salts, so water your plants first, apply feed, then water again. Your drip irrigation system is not designed to provide enough water for you to feed your plants. You will have to rely on the garden hose to push enough water through the root zone and not allow salt build up, or fertilizer burn. All of your plants will benefit from a good soaking with the hose at least once a week.

When my Japanese iris are in bloom, I do enjoy cutting the blooms to display in Ikebana arrangements, especially the water-reflecting style arrangement. Bring your blooms into the house to truly enjoy their beauty close up!

I think people should try Japanese iris in their gardens. They are spectacular plants, and the blooms are magnificent! Give them lots of water and some sort of shade cover in the summer, and you will enjoy them as I do!



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 October:

Divide and plant iris rhizomes this month, best done when temps stay below 100°. This will allow them time to establish roots before it gets cold.

Be sure that the plants get enough water, since they will be growing and increasing until next bloom time. Soil should be damp, but not moist. Do not water from overhead if it is above 85° though, or the rhizomes may rot. **Give the soil a dose of fertilizer.**

Keep area free of weeds, leaves, and pests.

**Tip Exchange**

Iris seeds must be copiously rinsed and then cold stratified prior to planting. Jody Nolin suggested the following interesting method in a recent AIS webinar. Place seeds in a small [organza drawstring bag](#) (the kind that some types of jewelry comes in). Draw the ribbon tightly and use an unfolded paperclip to suspend the bag in the water of the toilet tank for one week. The seeds' growth inhibitors will be washed away during the week's flushing action. Place bag in refrigerator for one month to cold stratify the seeds (by simulating winter), and then plant them - usually about 1/4" deep. They can take two or three years to sprout, so mark them and don't give up! - SC

Iris Haiku:

Garden is in ruins, but
When I settle down to dream
My mind imagines flowers...

- Sue Clark



'Violet Swallows' (Harris, 2016)

Mt. Pleasant Iris Farm

Did You Know?

Pseudatas are crosses between *Iris pseudacorus* (yellow flag) and *I. ensata* (Japanese iris), which places them in the AIS category of Species-Cross or Spec-X. They are not invasive like the *pseudacorus*, which spreads rapidly via seeds and rhizomes. *I. pseudacorus* is recognized as an important pollinator plant in the UK, but is banned in several states in the USA due to its invasiveness. *I. pseudacorus'* robustness is one of the reasons for crossing it with the fussier *I. ensata*. Pseudatas grow well in garden settings. Another reason for crossing them is to bring yellow into Japanese irises. (See photo above - the eyelash pattern is typical of pseudatas). - SC

Sources: AIS Species Iris webinar on 2 Sept 2020, and AIS Iris Wiki article on pseudatas.

"Nature always wears the colors of the spirit."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

A Little Bit of Botany and Iris History

John Bartram (1699-1777) imported and exported irises and other plants in the colony of Pennsylvania long before the time of the American Revolution. A self-taught botanist, he read widely and grew plants that he considered interesting. Bartram is considered the first American botanist and the father of American Botany. He started the first botanical garden in the colonies in 1727 along the banks of the Schuylkill River in what is now Philadelphia. At the time, his Kingsessing Botanical Garden was in the rural countryside. Benjamin Franklin was influential in encouraging and financially backing his friend in this endeavor. Bartram traveled through the American colonies collecting plants to satisfy the Europeans' thirst for new and different plants. Collecting trips to Lake Ontario in 1743 and to Florida in 1765-66 resulted in two books. Bartram travelled as far west as the Ohio River, as well. He provided Linnaeus with American irises for his classification work. By 1760, "Bartram's Boxes" supplied American plants to over fifty great estates in England. These boxes cost about 5 guineas each, which is about \$1400 in today's economy. Usually these were sent out in the fall and typically contained over 100 types of seeds and occasionally dried plant specimens. He did send live plants to a few select friends, although this was considerably more difficult and expensive. Both Ben Franklin and Bartram's friend and agent Peter Collinson, a fellow Quaker, lobbied King George III, who bestowed the title of King's Botanist for North America and an annual pension of £50 upon him. Bartram introduced several magnolias, rhododendrons, and the Venus flytrap.

Two of Bartram's sons and their descendants carried on the work in the Botanical Garden and nursery until 1850. Their Bartram's catalog in 1807 was likely the first plant catalog in America. In it, they offered 13 types of exotic iris species as well as five iris species native to America, along with many other types of plants.

Bartram's Garden of 46 acres with an 8-acre arboretum has been a National Historic Landmark since 1960 and is available for visiting. It was featured in the most recent of Diana Gabaldon's [Outlander](#) novels. - SC

Sources: "Prologue to 1920," by Bob Pries in The Early Years, Supplement 1 of 4 to IRISES, AIS Bulletin, 2020; and Wikipedia articles on John Bartram and on Bartram's Garden.