

TAIS Newsletter

Our 56th year

Tucson Area Iris Society - established 1965

An Affiliate of the American Iris Society



SPU 'Sonoran Sunset' (Wickenkamp 1992)

Kary Iris Gardens,
Scottsdale, Arizona

Photo by Sue Clark, 2020

President's Message

We're having a flower show! Our first show in two years thanks to you know what. No Zoom, no virtual, no joke, we will gather on April 17th at Harlow Gardens as TAIS members with our flowers to share. See you there. But wait, that's not all. The following week will be our first in many years garden tour. Kevin's, Susan's, and a secret garden will be on tour a week after the show. Remember your mask for both events and RSVP via Sue's instructions on page 2.

- Kevin Kartchner

“Regardless of the vintage – 1920’s and lingerie-esque in color, or the ruffles and flourishes of the 21st century – bearded irises own the scene in April and May, singularly or pluralistically, no matter where and with what they’re planted.” – Kelly Norris, *A Guide to Bearded Irises*

Inside this issue:

- Minutes from the March Meeting, Companion Plants as Helpers* 2
- Photo from the March Meeting, Notes from Darol's Presentation about Spurias* 3
- Treasurer's Report* 4
- Iris pseudacorus & Pseudata Hybrids - article and photos* 4
- Preparing Irises for the Show - Tips and Tricks* 5-6
- What to do in the Iris Garden for April, Tips* 7
- Iris Limerick, Did You Know? Bit of Botany and Iris History* 7

Upcoming Events

TAIS Iris Show: April 17 at Harlow Gardens Nursery, 5620 E. Pima Street. Setup at 8 AM. Show opens at 9 AM and ends at noon

TAIS Open-to-Members Garden Tours: April 24, see info on p. 2, col. 1

Tucson Master Gardener's Tour: postponed to April 2022. Note: Diane Tweedy's garden was scheduled to be on this year's & last year's tours, but both were cancelled

AIS Convention: postponed to April 11-16, 2022

Dues are due!

Birthday Wishes to:

Jim Wilcoxon Carol Peterson

Dorrell-Jo MacWhinnie

Kathy Chilton Joe Fernandes

♥ to Shirley Andrews & to Ardi Kary



Spuria hybrids - Source: illustration by J. Guillot from 'Revue horticole', 1910, Iris 'Monsieur' (Foster 1890) and Iris 'Ochraurea' (Foster 1890)

March Meeting Minutes



March 13, 2021 - 13 TAIS members Zoomed in to learn more about growing spuria irises from Darol Jurn of Sedona, AZ. See notes from his presentation on p. 3.

Business Meeting: Our Iris Show at Harlow's on April 17 will be more low-key than usual due to the pandemic. Bonnie will confirm the date and time with Harlow's on Monday. Kathy and her husband Dan will meet Kevin at TBG at 3 PM the day before to pick up items from storage. Setup will start at 8 AM on the 17th and the Show is scheduled to begin at 9 AM and last until noon. Kevin, Joyce, and Bonnie will work on Saturday and ensure that everything gets cleaned up and returned to storage. Joyce will bring bottles of water. Our members-only garden tours are scheduled for April 24 from 9 AM till noon. Please email taisnewsletter@yahoo.com to RSVP to receive directions to the gardens. We would love to

have a few more gardens in addition to Kevin's and Susan's. No extra prep work necessary! Joyce will deliver today's door prizes of potted iris to Candace and Maureen.

Board Meeting: Six individuals stayed to discuss TAIS items. Our May meeting might be about Backyard Wildlife Habitats. Bonnie reserved outdoor space at TBG on August 14 for our Auction. She will visit there on Monday to see how much shade there is, since the Garden is limiting their room capacities to 12 due to the virus. Hopefully we will be approaching pre-pandemic conditions by then and can be indoors. Kathy and Bonnie would love to hear if you have ideas for meeting topics.

If anyone would like to share photos of garden views of irises for the TAIS website, please submit to taisnewsletter@yahoo.com.

- Sue Clark, secretary

**Consider taking
photos of irises
for our Photo
Contest in October**



**We're on the web:
Tucsoniris.org**

Companion Plants as Helpers

We've discussed companion plants for irises in the sense of what complements them in looks and in growth requirements. Read more about those in our [May 2017](#) newsletter.

In her new book, [Plant Partners](#), horticulturalist Jessica Walliser pairs up plants that support one another in other ways.

Although this book is about crop plants, here are some of Jessica's suggestions that I thought might help us iris lovers. I chose two that involved iris pests - **thrips and aphids**. One technique is "trap cropping," in which a "sacrificial plant" lures insects to it and away from the crop plants. Research shows that **basil** keeps thrips away from pepper plants. [And maybe it would work with irises, too?] **Sweet alyssum** keeps aphids from lettuce [and maybe irises?] by attracting parasitic wasps and syrphid (hover) flies which lay their eggs in the aphids. Some of Jessica's recommendations are based on the science of insects finding host plants based on volatile chemicals produced by that plant. If a neighboring plant masks that odor, then the bugs get confused. This is likely what is happening when we grow onions and garlic with our irises to fend off aphids as TAIS member Kristee West has advocated.

Please let me know if you try any of these and how they work. -sc

Source for information: an email newsletter I get from Margaret Roach called [A Way to Garden](#).



March Meeting Photo



Growing Spuria Irises: Notes from Darol Jurn's presentation

Darol Jurn had years of experience growing irises in the Phoenix area (Goodyear, AZ) before moving to his present location in Sedona. He has been the newsletter editor for the [Spuria iris Society](#) for many years and publishes their [Spuria Checklist](#), a 285-page illustrated guide to all things Spuria.

Spuria irises are native to Europe, mostly the Mediterranean area, and their range extends into western Asia. They belong to the section *Limniris* (beardless irises), series Spuria.

Eric Nies (1884-1952), an early hybridizer of spurias, is credited with popularizing this type of iris. He crossed 'Monspur' (Foster 1890) with *Iris orientalis*, and by the next generation, many colors appeared. Marion Walker continued Nies' work after his death. The Eric Nies Medal is the highest award for spurias. In 2017, the Dave Niswonger trophy was created to encourage more individuals to hybridize spurias.

Planting and Growing Tips

Spurias seem to do well in our desert soils. Prepare soil as you would for tall bearded (TB) by adding compost. Darol tills in soil Sulphur and triple super phosphate. He mentioned that he planted his on 2' centers and that although spurias tolerate crowding well, he must divide them this summer for the first time in about seven years. Division is done when they are dormant and before new growth appears - probably June or July in Tucson and Phoenix (early September in Sedona and Prescott). Some spurias start growing in mid-August. Roots are tough and wire-like, making clumps difficult to dig.

Rhizomes may be removed from the outer edge of clumps when one has the urge to share a few.

After dividing, remove roots and then clean rhizomes by soaking them for about 10 minutes in a solution of 10% chlorine bleach and 90% water. Rinse well. Rhizomes must not be allowed to dry out, so after cleaning, wrap them in damp paper towels, seal in Ziplock bags, and store in the fridge until ready to plant. They often grow new leaves in the fridge. In October in Tucson and Phoenix (and by mid-September in Sedona and Prescott, six weeks before first freeze), plant rhizomes in a sunny spot, 1-2" deep and 2-3' apart. Be sure to press soil firmly around them to remove any air pockets. Water until new growth appears.

Darol uses 15-15-15 fertilizer for his TBs and spurias. The latter are heavy feeders and can tolerate more fertilizer. He mentioned that the same pests affect both types, with aphids being most common. He prepares a solution of 1 T liquid Castile soap and 32 oz water and sprays this on his plants. The same treatment also kills thrips and whiteflies. The lipids in the soap remove the outer coating of the bugs, causing their cells to desiccate.

Spurias tolerate freezing well, although it may cause a temporary dormancy. They flower a week or two after the TBs, extending the iris season. Spurias will likely bloom the second year after planting. Most of them have a summer dormancy period in which the leaves start browning in late May. When they are totally brown, Darol uses a [Barnel BLK730 sickle](#) to remove the foliage down to approximately an inch or two above ground level. He advises wearing a glove on one's free hand as protection from the sharp blade. Begin watering again when new growth appears in about September.

Darol waters all of his irises with a drip system, and pointed out that spurias also do well with flood irrigation. The drip lines to his spuria garden are turned off during the summer. Do not worry - summer rains will not harm spurias. When spurias begin showing new growth, commence watering. Darol waters all of his irises for 3-4 hours once a week. In the spring when temperatures rise and he notices the soil looking dry, he ups that to twice a week. The TBs do better with night waterings when it's hot. Darol related that Sun Country Iris Society members have been doing informal studies on this and have found that they get less soft rot when watering at night.

Places to see lots of spurias include the production garden at [Aitken's Salmon Creek Iris Gardens](#) in Vancouver, Washington, the [Descanso Gardens](#) in La Cañada Flintridge, California, and The Huntington in San Marino, California. [Comanche Acres](#) and [Wildwood Garden](#) offer spurias for sale.

Some of Darol's favorites are 'Speeding Star' (Cadd 2002), 'Zippy Zebra' (Kasperek 2015), and 'Adriatic Blue' (Niswonger 1995). - SC

Treasurer's Report for March - submitted by Martin Juarez

Beginning Balance					\$5,083.54
Date	Paid	MOP	Deposits	Expenses	
03/27/21			\$106.00		DUES *
Totals			\$106.00	\$0.00	\$106.00
Ending Balance					\$5,189.54
03/27/21 06:20 PM					
Check #1855 from February still pending.					
* Schaefer (Hook \$20 / Scire \$13) #3636; Modaff \$13/#1039; Swartz \$10/#1169; Foltz \$10/#19; Shelton \$10/#2165; Windischman \$10/#981; Glaser \$10/#6239; Connaughey \$10/#2881.					

Species Irises, Part VI: *Iris pseudacorus* & its pseudata hybrids (SpecX)

Iris pseudacorus, the yellow flag iris, is one of those plants that is so vigorous that it may cause problems. Because it readily increases by seeds *and* rhizomes, it can become invasive. This water-loving plant will quickly spread downstream, and spread further downstream with each passing season. Established rhizomes can survive extended dry intervals. It has been banned in some states, but is welcomed in other places. In England, it is valued as a nectar plant, and in Scotland, it provides habitat for endangered birds known as corncrakes. This iris can take up heavy metals and can grow in soils with a low pH, so is useful for water treatment and as a biologic indicator. It tends to behave when raised in garden beds, and would most likely behave when grown in or beside an artificial pond or bog. I am cultivating some in my garden this year and hoping that their vigorous nature shines through. My mom, sister, and niece grow them in Pennsylvania and a friend grows them in Scottsdale.

Pseudacorus is native to Europe, western Asia, and northwest Africa. The name refers to its similarity to sweet flag, *Acorus calamus*, thus "pseud acorus" ("false acorus"). *I. pseudacorus* is associated with inspiring the fleur-de-lis design and for indicating where Clovis, the first king of the Franks, could cross shallows of the Rhine River and either retreat from or attack the Goth army in the fifth century AD, depending on different versions of his legend.

Iris pseudacorus has been crossed with *Iris ensata*, the Japanese iris, and has successfully introduced yellow pigment into that type. These crosses, known as pseudatas, have a characteristic eyelash pattern around the signal on their falls. They grow vigorously near water, but adapt to garden situations. Since they are often sterile, they are not invasive. In regular garden soil, they grow to 3-4' tall, and in wet garden soil up to 5' tall. Established clumps bloom for about three weeks. They can have 3-4 branches and 10-16 buds. Pseudatas are less fussy about their growing conditions than *I. ensata*, which was one of the reasons for the cross. (More on *I. ensata* in the [Oct 2020](#) edition of this newsletter). Pseudadata flowers range from white to buttery yellow, gold, peach, rose, and purple. Leaves are chartreuse. Hiroshie Shimizu is a hybridizer of note, especially in recommending 'Gubijin' as a pod parent for pseudatas. AIS categorizes species crosses as SpecX.

Pseudatas need ample moisture, such as from a soaker hose. Water well when transplanting to help them settle in. They prefer soil enriched with organic matter and do best when transplanted in clumps of 2-3 fans rather than single fans, which can struggle. Divide every 3-4 years. Roots must never be allowed to dry out when dividing and transplanting. Plant rhizomes in small depressions 1-3" below the soil surface, which will allow them to receive more water. Mulch to help with moisture conservation. Pseudatas can be somewhat drought-tolerant when established. They are heavy feeders. Dose them with 10-10-10 before and after bloom season. Remove dead leaves and flower stalks as with all types of irises. For us, they may do best in pots that can be kept watered and moved into the shade in the summer.

[Ensata.com](#) offers 23 Pseudatas and [Mt. Pleasant Iris Farms](#) offers nine. TAIS member Terry Swartz grows *I. ensata* in Tucson, and if pseudatas are easier to grow than those, they should work for us! - SC

Sources: [Iris pseudacorus - Wikipedia](#), [Ensata.com](#), AIS Wiki article on Pseudatas, "[Pseudata](#)" Culture - [Mt. Pleasant Iris Farm](#)



From top: *Iris pseudacorus* (AIS Wiki), *I. ensata* (by Laitche on Wikimedia), 'Kinshikou,' 'Alabama Blue Fin,' 'Lemony Snicket,' and 'Lawton Ridge' ([Ensata.com](#))

Ready, Set – Showtime! For Irises, that is!



Preparing iris stalks for a show

Do's:

Choose a stalk with at least one bloom

Present the stalk well – see Tips and Tricks, below

Opt for a candelabra-like stalk for tall bearded varieties – flowers held well away from stalk, with branches on each side of stalk

Select a stalk with a gentle S-curve if possible for TB, IB, and BB varieties

Aim for flowers on the upper 2/3's of stalk (the 2/3's rule)

Show many varieties, including older and newer ones – only one stalk per variety, though

No No's:

Water spots – water the soil only

Petals touching stalks – use a piece of Styrofoam plate cut into a rectangle with a V notch at each end. Put in place five days before the show to help adjust the positioning. Slide it down daily to widen the gap.

Flowers touching each other – see use of Styrofoam plate above

Bugs, dirt, or debris – carefully remove with a moist Q-tip

Tears and blemishes – tiny tears ok

Missing flower parts

Dead or closing blooms – remove these carefully and unobtrusively

Fingerprints on the stalks – handle stalk by very bottom – can brush on talcum powder lightly to hide fingerprints

Poor presentation – presentation is just as important as a beautiful and perfect blossom

Tips and Tricks

Flowers which have opened naturally in the garden are best.

Consider bringing your irises in loose bud to the show the night before so that they will open overnight and be in excellent condition.

An almost-open bud can be slowed down by pinning a paper towel around it before transporting it to the show the night before. Remove towel upon arrival.

Slow a bud down in the refrigerator.

Hasten a bud with watering, especially if the weather has been dry.

Hasten a bud with warmth and bright light, perhaps on top of a water heater, with a nearby lamp.

Cut early if high winds are forecast. Or rain. Always cut early or late in day (most water, etc. in stalk).

Cut stalk at its base in the garden and trim it at the show, if necessary.

Ready, Set – Showtime! For Irises, that is! continued

Preparing iris stalks for a show, p. 2

Transport irises with utmost care:

Use a bucket with pieces of PVC pipe or rolled newspapers to hold the stems upright. Be sure to add water.

Use PVC pipe and PVC glue to create a carrying contraption - a grid with uprights for the stems and water.

Use a deep bucket, basket, or crate with vases or wine bottles.

At the Show:

You must use a vase that has been provided. Fill out and attach a label.

Cut stem if need be so that flowers are on upper 2/3's of stalk.

If stalk is too short, a piece of stalk may be used beneath it to raise it up. Be sure water reaches upper stalk.

Wedge stalks discretely with bits of foam.

Center the main stalk so that it is directly over the vase.

Turn the stalk so that any damaged (torn, broken, or creased) petals are in the back.

Tidying - remove up to 1/4" of damaged foliage, following natural contour of leaf.

- remove spent terminal blossoms and brown sheaths at base of flowers, if necessary. Trim them neatly.
- if there are two blooms per socket, trim one away. Same if there is a bud touching the flower.

Be sure that the best side of the flower stalk is facing forward and that blossoms are not blocked by a leaf. Carefully attach the label to the vase to indicate the front of the stalk.

Collections – the stalks should have similar branching, curves, and number of blooms. They need not be the same cultivar.

The irises that you bring do not have to be perfect. Part of our mission is to entice and educate the public about irises. And to have fun! You must have grown the irises that you show, though. (And that is a big part of the fun)!

Sources: Two PowerPoints: "Grooming," by Scarlett Ayres of the Mesilla Valley Iris Society, New Mexico, and "Stalking for the Best of Show," by AIS. Modified and summarized for this handout by Sue Clark for TAIS, 2018.



TAIS OFFICERS, ETC. FOR 2021

Kevin Kartchner - 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

Joyce Knill - Birthday cards

Susan Schaefer - Membership Chairperson

Dave Smith - Photographer

Sue Clark - Newsletter Editor & Publisher

What to do in the Iris Garden for April:

As your irises bloom, verify the flower against the name to be sure it is correct. (Consider using the AIS [Iris Wiki](#) for this). Redo labels if incorrect or faded. Re-map the bed.

Carefully remove spent blooms for maximum visual impact. Trim flower stalks at their base after they finish blooming, using scissors to help protect the rhizome from injury.

Continue applying a fertilizer high in phosphate, such as Super Bloom, for six to eight weeks after bloom time to boost the plant while it sets its future increases and buds.



Tip Exchange



This [4' X 8" sign](#) is available from the Old Farmer's Almanac store for \$41.95. Note the iris on the lower left.

[Grass-B-Gon](#) is safe to use in the Iris garden. It works better in warm weather and with longer grass. Be patient - results can take 3 weeks. -SC

[Blue J Iris Gardens](#) opens for orders on January 1 every year. If there is an iris you really want, order early. I was going to order 'Mesmerizer' and 'Thornbird' from my Wish List, but these two were sold out by the time I thought of it in late February. - SC

Iris Limerick:

What if we had a personal cloud
That came when its name was called out loud?
It would shower our yard,
But not very hard;
Our very own sprinkling cloud.
- Sue Clark



Iris tectorum

Did You Know?

Iris tectorum was grown on thatched roofs in Japan and China, and is known as the "roof iris." It may have been raised on roofs because during times of war or famine, land had to be planted with food crops and not flowers. Other reasons for growing it on roofs were it looked beautiful, it bound the thatch together, and because it was thought that it would prevent disease and evil spirits from entering the household. Women used the plants in hair dyes, face powder, and for medicines. - SC

- Source: Wikipedia article - [Iris tectorum](#)

"A visit to the greenhouse lifts my spirit. Studies have shown that being around plants can help reduce stress and boost creativity." – Martha Stewart in Living magazine, Jan/Feb 2021

A Little Bit of Botany and Iris History

Amateur gardeners began growing more and more irises in their gardens as they learned about them from magazines, books, and catalogs. As early as the 1820's, some began giving names to new cultivars which were the result of cross pollination by bees. Two of these early iris aficionados were Ernst Von Berg from Germany and Marie-Guillaume (Paul) de Bure from Paris. The former did not introduce any of his hybrids, but de Bure has been credited with the first named and introduced iris, 'de Bure's Iris' (before 1833). This *plicata*, with its white flowers dotted in lilac-rose, is often called 'Buriensis.' By 1848, de Bure had the largest iris collection in France. His efforts seemed to set off a chain reaction. Henri-Antoine Jacques bred irises, including 'Aurea' (1830), which is still grown today. He is also noted as the originator of Bourbon Roses. His work inspired Jean-Nicolas Lémon, who offered 100 varieties of irises in 1848. The seeds Lémon planted for his thousands of seedlings were the result of bee crosses as de Bure's had been. Lémon offered hundreds of cultivars for sale annually from 1840 to 1850, but he and others realized little improvement in irises over this interval. Read more about these early hybridizers in the [April](#), [May](#), and [June 2017](#) issues of this newsletter, respectively. 🐝

Many irises offered during this early period were the bulbous English Irises. According to a source from 1841, these were first collected by the Dowager Duchess of Portland along a river near Fladbury in Worcestershire, England in about 1511. Although the ones that she found were a "deep brilliant blue," sports (mutations) of all colors have developed, some with shading and mottling. Centuries later, collectors discovered this iris growing wild in the Pyrenees Mountains in Spain, likely its original habitat. The name has undergone changes as older versions were found in publications: *Iris xiphioides*, *I. latifolia*, *I. anglica*, and finally *I. jaquinii*. According to the Iris Wiki, English Irises flower in June, are easy to grow, and seed freely. In the 1840's, their blooms were larger than those of any bearded iris known. No wonder they were prized. - SC

Sources: "Prologue to 1920," by Bob Pries in The Early Years - Supplement 1 of 4 to IRISES, AIS Bulletin, 2020; Wikipedia article on *Iris latifolia*; and AIS wiki article on *I. latifolia*.