

TAIS Newsletter

Our 56th year

Tucson Area Iris Society - established 1965

An Affiliate of the American Iris Society



'Scoonchee'
(DeSantis 1996)

Chandler, Arizona

Photo by Sue Clark, 2020

President's Message

If you think it's been a long time: today my 5-year-old grandson asked (along with "Are we there yet?"), "When will Covid be over?" Imagine what percentage of his, and his 2.5-year-old brother's life, have been in this environment!

A number of clubs in Region 15 were almost totally inactive during 2020. Between our distanced and Zoom gatherings, TAIS has been doing pretty well. Be thinking about having your garden on our spring tour. We'll start 2021 with a presentation from Sue Clark. The year to return to normal...sometime: **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

- Kevin Kartchner

“Nature dances to a rhythm: In the way the sun rises and sets. In the birds’ song at sunrise and in the crickets’ chirp at sunset. In the way each season moves us along throughout the year....the annual cadence of a rainy April, giving way to a hot July, giving way to a crisp October, giving way to a cold January, and the thousands of little orchestras that follow the tempo of that grand symphony. The flowers move to the rhythm of the seasons: sprouting and budding and blooming and dying.” - Magnolia Journal, fall 2020 issue

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Upcoming Events

Next meeting: January 9, 2021, 1 PM. "The Iris in Fine Art" Zoom presentation by Sue Clark. Van Gogh, Monet, O'Keeffe, and many others. A visual feast awaits!

February 13: Zoom meeting, 1 PM. Jim Hedgecock, hybridizer

March 13: Zoom meeting, 1 PM. Darol Jurn - Spurias

Birthday Wishes to:

Maxine Fifer

Kathy Windischman

Bonnie Else

Nancy Hook

Marilyn Jensen

Michael Willing

Whitney Judd

♥ to Diane and Shirley



Siberian Iris

Curtis's Botanical Magazine

Gardening for Wildlife

In our times of ever-shrinking natural habitats, many kinds of creatures are struggling. Consider offering a small sanctuary for them in your own yard! All of these little patchwork havens across the country add up to a big support system for animals. The National Wildlife Federation will [certify](#) your habitat for \$20, which is used to help fund their programs.

When I certified our yard in Chandler in about 1990, I had to provide a list of all of my plants and other items in each required category, but nowadays the application is online and is quick and easy. Only five Yes or No answers are necessary. The categories are Food, Water, Cover, Places to Raise Young, and Sustainability. We'll examine these topics and their requirements, along with what Dave and I have provided in our yard for each one.

1. Food – Does your habitat provide at least three food sources for wildlife? In our yard, we have six hummingbird feeders (the favorite one changes from time to time), two goldfinch feeders, and many nectar-rich plants. The hummingbirds love our aloes, Tecoma (yellow bells), cape honeysuckle, and pink trumpet vine. These birds also help us out by eating lots of flying insects. Bees go for our

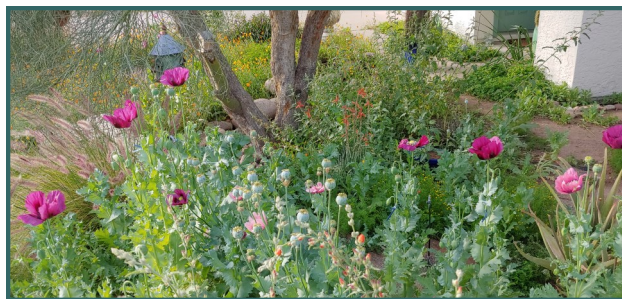


breadseed/annual poppies and a palo verde tree in blossom in the spring, and plenty of globe mallows and oxalis or wood-sorrel. I recently planted some milkweed seeds that a neighbor gave us. We've noticed that butterflies love our bougainvillea and our springtime display of African daisies, even if Chandler Code Enforcement imagines that the latter are weeds. Consider selecting plants so that some are blooming in each of three (or four) seasons to provide pollinators with adequate food.

2. Water - Does your habitat provide at least one water source for wildlife? Six birdbaths and a fountain dot our suburban yard. Dave adds fresh water daily and keeps these clean. When we went away one fall, I ran drippers to two of the birdbaths to keep them supplied. The birdbath in our front yard is simply a plant saucer on an inverted flower pot since somebody stole the one that was there.



Another plant saucer sits in a flower bed and has a dripper going into it permanently – some Inca doves and other ground birds prefer this one. (It was also a favorite of our Scottie dog, Steven). We had a similar saucer set-up in our yard in Tucson when we had a house there, and one morning a young Cooper's hawk stood in it for about 30 minutes cooling his heels. The bees like to get a drink too, and a large rock in the birdbaths gives them a chance to crawl out of the water if they happen to fall in. The fountain is a bird magnet – goldfinches, hummingbirds, starlings (who prefer group bathing), and some of the less shy members of our local flock of feral rosy-faced lovebirds are there often. Our son bought the [fountain](#) for us from LampsPlus.com, who sent it via free shipping.



Gardening for Wildlife, continued

3. Cover - does your habitat provide at least two sources of cover for wildlife?

Shrubs, trees, groundcover plants, flower beds – there are many types of cover available. I hang metal flowers, metal creatures, and other decorative items on our block wall to fancy it up, and we often see lizards run behind these to shelter and cool off a bit. Nails pound easily into the spaces between the blocks, so it is simple to hang things. We have a bug hotel, too, which seems to mostly serve a decorative function. Lizards climb up the trees, probably for some lizard activities known only to them – perhaps hunting for bugs. A note of caution – I noticed black widows taking up residence in the saucers of some of my self-watering pots last summer. Watch for their webs at the opening for adding water to the saucer.



4. Young - does your habitat provide at least two places where wildlife can raise their young?

We hung two wooden bird boxes on the huge eucalyptus tree in our backyard, as well as a ceramic bird jar, and a bird house shaped like a bee (more decorative and just for fun). We also have a bird house attached to a column on our back porch. Something else that we provide is nesting fluff. I get it at the Wild Birds Unlimited store (there is one 6546 E. Tanque Verde Road in Tucson) and offer it in two hanging metal peanut dispensers from the same store. One year, we saw four goldfinch fledglings in the yard, one every three days. We have lots of lizards and I suppose that they lay their eggs under cover in the flower beds and in other places. Some things that I would like to add include a composter, bat house, and an owl house. And of course, more plants!

5. Sustainability – Do you employ at least two practices from these sustainable garden categories?

- **Soil and Water Conservation** – examples include limiting water use, composting, mulching, reducing lawn and pavement, using soaker hoses, installing a rain garden or rain barrel.

Our plants are on drippers, some from a soaker hose line. Portions of our yard are covered in decomposed granite and river rock. We used to have a compost bin, but a rat started getting in it and took up residence. We had to get rid of our grill for the same reason! We have a rain chain, but no rain barrel yet. I mulched after Adam's presentation.

- **Controlling Invasive Exotic Species** – examples include using native plants, removing any invasive exotic plants, keeping cats indoors.

See the NWF website for lists of native plants by region, <https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/>, or see www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds.

- **Organic Practices** - examples include eliminating chemical pesticides and fertilizers, attracting beneficial insects.

After I got stung by a scorpion ten times one day (it was inside my clothes), we hired a pest control service. I cancelled them in 2018, because even though it was touted as “organic,” it was still killing things indiscriminately. I now carefully use Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*, a soil-borne bacteria which is toxic to caterpillars and causes them to stop feeding) spray to control the tiny worms (probably moth larvae) that eat our orange Tecoma.

Praying mantis show up now and then. We even had a white one last year! I recently read that [dill](#) and [tansy](#) will attract ladybugs and lacewings to your garden, both beneficial insects that eat the aphids that we do not want on our irises!

I urge you to create your own wildlife haven. Or to certify it if you already have the elements in place! The metal sign on our front porch that indicates that our yard is a certified wildlife habitat generates interest and discussion from human visitors. And local animals will enjoy & appreciate the sanctuary that you've created for them. – SC



Gardening for Wildlife, continued

Milkweeds - if you add only one native plant to your garden, make it a milkweed! I checked two nurseries near me and they both sell it nowadays, likely due to demand from wildlife gardeners.

Milkweeds recommended for Arizona: butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), antelope-horns (*A. asperula*), rush (*A. subulata*), and Arizona (*A. angustifolia*). See Monarch Joint Venture for a [downloadable handout](#) with photos of these types and [tips](#) on buying and growing milkweed.

Because milkweeds are difficult to grow from seed unless one lives in an area that has the cold winters required for them to germinate, it is easiest to grow them from plants. If you want to try stratifying the seeds, sandwich them in moist paper towels and seal these in a Ziplock bag. Store in the refrigerator for 30 days or more before planting them in pots. (Source - "Master Milkweed" by Deb Wiley in *Birds & Blooms* magazine, August-September 2020).

Avoid planting tropical milkweed (*A. curassavica*) because it hosts a protozoan parasite (*Ophryocystis elektroscirrha* or OE) that harms monarchs. This plant with lovely orange-red flowers is also known as bloodflower, Mexican milkweed, and butterfly weed. The [Xerces Society](#) for Invertebrate Conservation lists it as a **No-Grow species**. It's worth learning more about the tropical milkweed [issues](#) because it is sold at many local nurseries. - SC



Xerces Society

"...frankly, it's depressing to talk about the losses of birds and insects and so forth. I'd much rather focus the conversation about positive things that you can do to support the maximum amount of life in your little pocket, and hope that what you do connects with maybe what your neighbors are doing and that on the sort of local to regional scale, we can actually really make a difference. And so I think inherently, it's a very hopeful message. It's not one that sometimes feels like we're trying to tell you what you can and you can't plant." – Uli Lorimer of Native Plant Trust - <https://awaytogarden.com/be-a-discerning-shopper-for-native-plants-with-uli-lorimer/>.

Our milkweed story - Dave and I bought an Arizona milkweed at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum in late October. Two weeks later, we noticed a monarch caterpillar devouring it! He must have come with the plant, either as an egg or a tiny caterpillar. I noticed him on a Friday, we had to buy a second milkweed plant for him on the following Monday morning, and on Thursday he split open to reveal his chrysalis. After ten days, the Monarch emerged in all his glory! - SC



Treasurer's Report for December - submitted by Martin Juarez

Beginning Balance				\$5,746.90	
Date	Pd	MOP	Deposits	Expenses	
10/26/20	X		\$10.00		DUES - Pappas #138
No entries for November.					
12/11/20	X		\$13.00		DUES - Demato/Willing #4853
12/11/20	X	#1852		\$53.90	Clark -stamps/newsletters
Totals			\$23.00	\$53.90	-\$30.90
Ending Balance				\$5,716.00	12/26/20 07:35 PM
This report includes a revision of October's amounts. I entered the wrong beginning balance for that month resulting in a \$160.00 discrepancy.					
Group logo shirts: I have been in contact with Jodie from Renegade Classics Cycle Wear and am in the process of getting that set up so that everyone can stop by and get their shirts done. I'm hoping to provide an image to the group before placing your individual orders. Stay tuned!					

Species Irises, Part V: Siberian Irises & their hybrids

Eleven species of irises make up the group or series known as Sibericae. One of these, *Iris siberica*, lent its name to the whole group. Siberians are native to many parts of temperate Europe from France and Germany eastward, and on into Asia. Three of the species have 28 chromosomes and the others, all from China, have 40. The ones with 28 chromosomes are easier to grow in the garden than the ones with 40, especially because they require less water and will tolerate somewhat alkaline soils. The species with 40 chromosomes bloom a bit later, and so are valued even though their flowers are smaller. Since these eight are from China, they are referred to as Sino-Siberians, and are also known as the subseries Chrysographes. They require more water and are less cold-hardy than the types with 28 chromosomes.

Siberian irises tend to hold their elegant flowers up above the leaves. They are beardless and hardy to the point of thriving in neglect, rarely needing division or food. In fact, the word "foolproof" was used. They are found happily growing in long-abandoned gardens. Siberians tend to bloom during the same interval as Tall Bearded, but go a bit longer. Leaves are narrow and lance-shaped, and they form dense clumps. In frosty climates, the leaves turn reddish brown and remain an attractive feature in a garden. Cutting to 1" is suggested when leaves wither. They prefer organic material in their soil. In our climate, afternoon shade is essential in summers, as is mulching and some water. Roots must be kept moist between dividing and replanting, which is done to a depth of 1". Siberians make excellent cut flowers and are lovely in borders, too.

According to lore, monks collected Siberian irises in Siberia during the Middle Ages and cultivated them in their monastery gardens. The irises spread from that point and there is a record of them being grown in England as early as 1596. They were first described and named by Linnaeus in 1753. Hundreds of Siberian hybrids have been registered with AIS, in a range of colors - white, yellow, orange, blue, purple, brown, and nearly black. Some have ruffles, wide falls, or extra falls.

According to information from Jody Nolan in a recent AIS webinar, Siberians prefer areas which have cold winters. She suggested **two varieties that are exceptions to this rule.** 'Caesar's Brother' (Morgan 1932) does not need a cold period, so would be a good one for us to grow, as would 'Where Eagles Dare' (Helsley 1993). Buy the former [here](#) or [here](#).

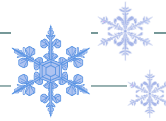
'Swans in Flight' (Hollingworth 2006) won the American Dykes Medal, which is nearly always awarded to a Tall Bearded iris. Its large and lovely flowers arrive late in the season. (See photo). The top medal for Siberians is the Morgan-Wood Medal, which this iris also won.

I could certainly use a foolproof iris, and will be ordering some 'Caesar's Brother' soon! - SC

Sources: *The Gardener's Guide to Growing Irises* by Geoff Stebbings, 1997, Timber Press: Portland, Oregon; Wikipedia article on Siberian Iris; *The Gardener's Iris Book* by William Shear, 1998, Taunton Press: Newtown, Connecticut; AIS webinar on Beardless Irises by Jody Nolan, 11 Nov 2020; and The Society for Siberian Irises [website](#).



From top: *Iris siberica* (by [Böhringer Friedrich](#) on Wikipedia), 'Caesar's Brother,' 'Where Eagles Dare,' 'Swans in Flight,' and 'Judy, Judy, Judy' (AIS Wiki)



TAIS OFFICERS, ETC. FOR 2021

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Bonnie Else - Vice President

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Martin Juarez – Treasurer, Asst. Secretary

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Dave Smith - Photographer

Sue Clark - Newsletter Editor & Publisher

What to do in the Iris Garden for January:

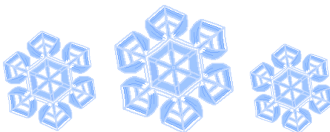
Keep area free of leaves, weeds and pests.

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. Plan to 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

Clearing away dried iris leaves and other organic debris in fall and spring will help prevent (or at least reduce) iris diseases and pests. As outer iris leaves wither through the spring and summer, remove and destroy them.

If irises are crowded, pests can easily move between plants, and diseases can thrive due to poor air circulation. Divide the plants [in late September or October] and situate them in soil that is well-drained and organic-rich in a spot with [winter] sun. -SC

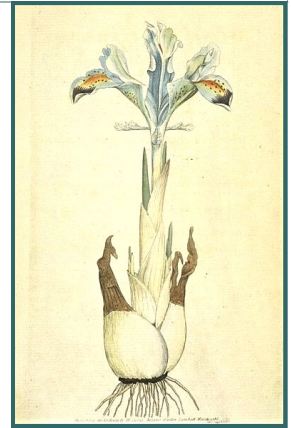
Source: William Shear, *The Gardener's Iris Book*, 1998

Iris Limerick:

Huddled under the ground
But definitely still around,
The rhizomes await,
Dependent upon Fate,
To present the best blooms in town!
- Sue Clark

Did You Know?

One species of Siberian iris, *I. chrysographes*, is nearly black. Its name is derived from golden markings that resemble writing on the falls. Like other irises, it will attract butterflies and hummingbirds to the garden. This petite plant carries its blooms up above its spiky leaves. Stems are 18-20". It makes an excellent cut flower. - SC
Sources: *Birds & Blooms* magazine Oct/Nov 2020 issue and *The Gardener's Guide to Growing Irises* by Geoff Stebbings, 1997.



Iris persica

“Our vision of a celebrity is a transcendent baker
or an expert iris grower.” - *Martha Stewart Living* magazine, Dec 2020



A Little Bit of Botany and Iris History

Botanical magazines played an important role in raising awareness of the iris as a garden plant beginning in the late eighteenth century. These serial magazines featured color portraits of plants, often ones blooming for the first time in a public garden, along with a botanical description and cultural requirements to go with the picture. Additional information often included a source, how the plant was originally obtained (where it or its seeds were collected), and its common name(s).

The earliest of such magazines was *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*, which was first published in 1787 and it continues to the modern day. Many of the botanical illustrations of irises that I use in this newsletter are from that magazine. I find most of them on Pinterest. William Curtis himself worked at Kew Gardens, and was an apothecary and botanist. Illustrations for the first 30 volumes were printed from copper plates and then hand colored by a staff of up to 30 people. One of the first plates is of *Iris persica*, a lovely little blue iris. (See above). Beginning in the late 1870's, there was a series of women as principal artists. By 1920, *Curtis's Bot. Mag.* (as it was referred to) had featured 8,873 plants, of which 107 were irises. By that particular year, enough people had been captivated by irises that the American Iris Society was created. *Curtis's Bot. Mag.* is the most widely-cited source of its kind. It is now published by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

Other magazines attempted to imitate *Bot. Mag.*'s success, including *The Botanist's Repository* (1797-1807), *Edward's Botanical Register* (1815-1847), *The English Flower Garden* (1823-1829), and *Annales des Flores et Des Pommes* (1832-1847). An American one called *Addisonia* began in 1916. It was published by the New York Botanical Garden and lasted for 50 years. It was named after Addison Brown, a co-founder of that Garden. This journal is still prized for its high-quality illustrations and detailed plant descriptions. *Addisonia* published drawings of several American irises and helped to popularize those. - 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 *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* and *Addisonia* (journal).