

TAIS Newsletter

Tucson Area Iris Society - established 1965

Our 57th year

An Affiliate of the American Iris Society



President's Message

I think I finally figured it out. What is that "old white" iris that I've been growing for decades and gave away rhizomes of at our last TAIS meeting? While reading a [1961 article on iris genetics](#), it mentioned an "old...early spring-blooming white iris...*albicans*." Could it be? A quick Google and my "old white" looks and behaves exactly like *Iris albicans*. This iris was thriving in a small bed when we moved into our previous house 30 years ago. It is one tough plant. I spread it around my yard from full sun to deep shade and almost no water to constantly soaked and it keeps blooming. It even survived the Aspen Fire that incinerated my parents' cabin on Mt. Lemmon. *I. albicans* is always the first, often by several weeks, to bloom in my garden and gets me excited for what is to come with the TB bloom. The buds and blooms aren't affected by light frosts that tend to damage my TBs. The blooms are smaller, old form of course, and only 2-3 per stalk but their quantity in a small clump makes up for the flower size. I laugh at my much younger and less iris-knowledgeable self that thought I could make the blooms larger like other TBs by fertilizing more and differently. Of course it didn't work as fertilizer doesn't - **cont. on p. 2**

NOID

Marcusen Sculpture Garden
Prescott, Arizona

Photo by Sue Clark, 2021

"The shortest day has passed, and whatever nastiness of weather we may look forward to in January and February, at least we notice that the days are getting longer. Minute by minute they lengthen out. It takes some weeks before we become aware of the change. It is imperceptible even as the growth of a child, as you watch it day by day, until the moment comes when with a start of delighted surprise we realize that we can stay out of doors in a twilight lasting for another quarter of a precious hour." - Vita Sackville-West, "Over winter's hump"

Inside this issue:

Minutes from the January meeting, TAIS 2022 meeting schedule	2
Photos from the January meeting	3
Growing Irises in Beds in Tucson - Notes from the Panel Discussion	4-5
Interview of TAIS member Joyce Knill	6
Treasurer's Report, <i>Iris unguicularis</i> - article and photos	7
What to do in the Iris Garden during February	8
Iris Limerick, Did You Know?	8
Tips, Bit of Botany and Iris History	8

Upcoming Events

Next meeting: February 12 at 1 PM via [Zoom](#). Terry Swartz - Growing Japanese Irises in Tucson

Feb 15: Early Bird Deadline for AIS convention in Las Cruces: The tour-only package costs \$175 + \$70 conference fee. Register [here](#)

March 12 meeting: 1 PM - Water Harvesting

Dues are due! Find the form [here](#)

Birthday Wishes to:

Greta Dunnigan	Dave Smith	Sam Wymer
Shirley Andrews	Sue Clark	Barb Nicholson
Stanna Schoepel	Maureen Kelly	Marie Radecki
Candace Pappas	Thomas Modaff	



Iris unguicularis

January Meeting Minutes



8 January - 19 TAIS members gathered at the Tucson Botanical Gardens (and two joined via Zoom) for a panel presentation about growing irises in beds and borders. The impetus for the topic was a request from Debbie at Harlow's Gardens for a handout.

With several guests and rather-new members present, everyone introduced themselves. We firmed up dates and places to meet. Libraries are still closed to meetings. Diane and Sally have lined up an interesting schedule for the year. (See it at right).

Board Meeting - 2:42 to 3:10. We need a location for the February meeting, as Terry prefers to present in person. Diane will call the library to see if they know when they might allow meetings again.

Joyce mentioned that Park Mall has recently been sold. She will check on the possibility of renting a space there. Diane said that she used to work with malls and

the issue is liability. Her Rose Society chapter chips in for liability insurance from their parent organization each year.

To Zoom or not to Zoom? Do we need to have a paid subscription since Sue's friend no longer will have the account that we have been using? Kevin reported that it is expensive. Diane believes the pandemic has another year or two, and that we *should* offer Zoom access. She mentioned that for the Rose Society, they record the program (via Zoom) and post it on a private YouTube channel and send the link to members. An alternative is to take advantage of the free 40 minutes that Zoom offers and only connect during the program portion.

Diane Tweedy's friends and family donated money to us last September. We will order rhizomes for our members in honor and memory of Diane.

Joyce will chair the Sale. We'll order something on the

order of this - \$500 from Lauer's Flowers, \$350 from Mid-America Gardens, as well as \$200 in spuria from Comanche Acres. Sue will spend \$400 on rhizomes for the auction (and possibly Club irises) from Mid-America and the Diane Tweedy Memorial Irises will also come from there. - SC

TAIS 2022 Schedule

Feb 12 at 1 PM - Terry Swartz - Growing Japanese Irises in Tucson - via Zoom

March 12 at 1 PM - Margot Garcia - Water Harvesting. Location TBA

April 2 - Iris Show. Location TBA

April 3 from 9 AM till noon - tours of TAIS members' iris gardens

April 9 - Master Gardeners Garden Tour - we talked about manning a TAIS table in Diane Tweedy's garden

April 11-16 - AIS Convention in Las Cruces. See link on p. 1 to register

May 14 at 1 PM - at TBG's Porter Hall - Kathleen Roberts - Pollinator Gardens

June & July - no meetings

Aug 6 at 1 PM - TAIS Auction at TBG's Porter Hall. Sue, chair

September 17 - Rhizome Sale - Harlow's Gardens, 9 AM start time. Joyce, chair

October - 5th-Annual Photo Contest. Sue, chair

November - Potluck with plant and seed swap

December - no meeting

President's Message, cont. from p. 1

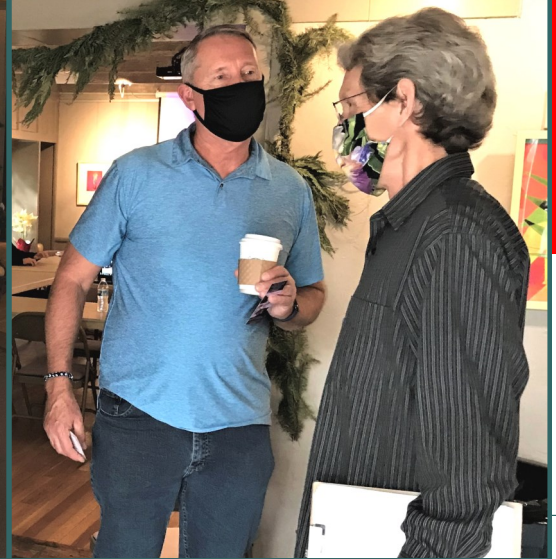
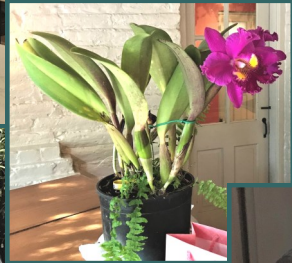
change genes. "*Iris albicans* has been cultivated since ancient times and may be the oldest iris in cultivation... It has been in cultivation since at least 1400 BC" per [Wikipedia](#). So now it's your turn to grow and enjoy this piece of iris history. - Kevin Kartchner

Las Cruces, NM
is only 3.75 hours
from Tucson



We're on the web:
Tucsoniris.org

TAIS January Meeting - Photos by Dave Smith



Growing Irises in Beds in Tucson

Panel organized & moderated by Diane Pavlovich

Types of Irises Grown Successfully

Sam ("SW," lives on the east-side) - tall bearded (TB) do best, arilbreds also do well

Kristee ("KW," lives in Green Valley) - only grows bearded irises, mostly TB

Madeleine ("MG," lives in Marana) - TB and spurias

Sally ("SV," lives mid-town) - TB and Dutch irises. Important to mark where the Dutch ones are located so that you don't accidentally dig there after their leaves die away

Terry ("TS," lives downtown) - TB, arilbreds, and Japanese (lives in a colder part of town)

Kevin ("KK," lives on the east-side) - TB, spuria, Dutch, *Moraea*, *I. albicans*, and trying some Japanese (also lives in a colder part of Tucson)

Preparing the soil

SW - sifts native soil to remove rocks, amends with about 2" of sifted compost. Good drainage is crucial, as is the right lighting - lots of sun in cool season, morning to early afternoon sun then shade in hot season

SV - regularly supplements soil with compost that she makes herself, as it tends to break down and needs replenishing. Creates a bit of a raised bed (for drainage) by using rocks along the edges. A pecan shell mulch helps suppress weeds and grass in beds

KK - tills in a 3-4" layer of compost to a depth of about 10". Purchases it by the pickup-truck-load at [Acme Sand & Gravel](#). Is trying 2-3" of pecan shell mulch as recommended by Adam from Tucson Botanical Gardens

TS - digs and amends soil to about 2', as iris roots go that deep. He digs a trench, about 3' wide X 2' deep, mixes mushroom compost from Home Depot with screened native soil (50-50 mix), removes all roots because they release a gas while decomposing that is toxic to irises and roses. Sprinkles Triple Super Phosphate about 8" below the surface to place it at root level for the new plants (since Phosphate does not move through the soil)

KW - creates a 50-50 mix of native soil and [Tanks Green Stuff](#) compost. Irises appreciate soil acidified with used coffee grounds (free from Starbucks, etc.) or a soil acidifier since our native soil is alkaline. When creating a new bed, [double dig](#) it down past the caliche level

SW - the Tanks facility is located at 7301 E Speedway behind the Eastside City Hall

Joyce ("JK," lives east-side) - Tanks Green Stuff is sold at [several places](#), including Ace Hardware stores in Tucson. Her favorite compost is [Arbico](#) from Oro Valley

Fertilizing

SW - for new plantings, mix 1 T Triple Super Phosphate in hole, add bone meal and soil Sulphur

KW - applies [Miracle-Gro Bloom Booster](#) (10-52-10) every 2 weeks starting on Valentine's Day and continuing until blooming begins. Rebloomers need fertilizing to bloom in the fall

KK - uses ammonium phosphate

TS - feeds his irises the same as his roses. Beginning in the first week of February, he adds fish meal, Epsom salts, alfalfa meal, [Milorganite](#). Fish emulsion can be applied anytime. He likes Miller's Rose Food from Home Depot. **Keep bone meal away from Japanese irises - it will kill them!** He said an iris mentor suggested applying water-soluble fertilizer beginning in November (probably high in phosphate)

SW - keep nitrogen levels low [below 10] for irises - fertilizers with too much nitrogen can incite rot

Watering

SW - waters once or twice a week. In summer while the plants are dormant, he floods his iris beds in the evening about every 10 days to two weeks and *never waters from overhead*

KW - uses a moisture meter and waters when the roots need it. An iris mentor told her to water a newly-planted iris like this - once every 3 days for 15 days, every 4 days for 16 days, and then once a week. If temperatures are above 95°, water the *soil* in evening so as not to encourage rot. Because her irises are on the same drip line as many other plants, she moves emitters farther away from the irises in summer to reduce the amount of water they get. The moisture meter is a crucial tool for her. Drainage ditches through beds can help monsoon moisture drain away. Raised beds serve the same purpose

TS - has no issues with monsoon moisture. His irises grow in bowls or trenches. Consider that microclimates exist across town

Dividing Irises

SW - divide every 3-4 years or when crowded

TS - irises will stop blooming due to crowding

Shade

KK - tried shade cloth labeled as 30% (but read 50% with a light meter) and had his worst bloom season ever

SW - tried putting up shade cloth in late May and noticed no difference. Cover rhizome with a thin layer of soil in the summer. Recalled now-shuttered Shepard's Iris Commercial Garden in Phoenix - all fields in full sun

KW - brush soil off of rhizome in spring. She plants squash and other summer vegetables beside irises. They will shade and cool the soil. She does not mulch her irises

SV - is experimenting with shade, mulch, more

Brown leaves - remove? leave on plant?

KW - removes browned leaves

TS - keeps brown leaves attached for shade. His irises are happy growing between his rose bushes

Grubs

TS - applies Bayer Advanced Season-long Grub Control [now called [BioAdvanced](#)]. Had no luck with nematodes

JK - applied the above-listed Bayer product to flower beds two years ago and has not seen any grubs since. It is *not* for vegetable beds, however!

Common Iris Mistakes - by KW

- planting in poorly draining soil/clay/caliche
- soil too alkaline
- soil too hot
- over-watering
- planting too deep
- planting too close to other plants
- not fertilizing when planting
- failure to fertilize when the new growth starts in the spring
- failure to keep plants clean
- failure to water regularly

- SC, from my notes



TAIS iris grower's interview #15

TAIS member Joyce Knill gardens on the east side of Tucson. One of her childhood memories is sitting on the edge of the lawn to weed her mother's iris beds on their farm in southwest Minnesota. Later Joyce began growing irises because they were reportedly so easy to grow and because one did not have to worry about the cold Minnesota winters harming them. She grew fabulous irises in Roselle, Illinois. After moving to Tucson, Joyce reported that she made the mistake of going to a TAIS iris show at Park Mall, where she bought more than she should. These grew but didn't bloom, so back she went the following year and explained her dilemma to a kindly older gentleman there at the show. Apparently he said, "My goodness! Raise them up to the surface! You're not in Minnesota anymore, girl!" He also explained how to fertilize them. And she had beautiful blooms that next spring.

Joyce currently has irises in a stock tank that gets some sun, in whiskey barrels, in large terra cotta pots, and nine in the ground as an experiment. The latter are in a bed by themselves, with dwarf ruella and annual salvia along the boundaries. She said that she has wonderful soil in her yard, a touch sandy, and that she spaded in good-quality compost to a depth of 15". Her fertilizers of choice are fish emulsion and Mac's Magic Mix (call (520) 298-2822 to buy). In 2022, she is determined to use only natural fertilizers so as not to contribute more salts to her soil. She has onions growing with her irises to discourage aphids.

Pests to Joyce's irises have included ground squirrels and pack rats (who chewed the rhizomes and took the nametags) when she lived on the west side of Tucson, voles when she lived in Charlotte, NC (who took the rhizomes down their holes but left the tags), and most recently – flea beetles in her current yard. [Neem oil](#), her go-to remedy, got rid of the latter. She placed mouse traps under upside-down flower pots (so that dogs would not be injured) and trapped 64 voles in NC. All surviving irises, as well as her real favorites – day lilies – she dug up and brought with her in burlap bags when she and her husband moved back to Tucson. (Many of Joyce's irises are well-traveled. She had moved her remaining Tucson irises with her to NC. Some of

them are historic and had been sent to her by her sister who lives in northern Minnesota). Some of Joyce's other iris mishaps and disasters involved too much sun, too much shade, and too light of a soil mixture.

When it comes to watering, Joyce prefers to water by hand. She uses a moisture meter, and only waters if it reads "Dry" when the probe is inserted to a depth of 3-4". For a 12" pot, she holds the running hose to the soil for a count of five (approximately) and watches to see if the pot drains. The nine irises in the ground are watered by a soaker hose.

Joyce has not had to divide her irises yet, but is hoping that she will grow them well enough to have to do that chore soon! She has three that will probably need dividing this year.

As to her favorite type of iris, it is tall bearded – especially any [amoena](#) (ah-MEE-nah) (light standards and dark falls) as well as dark selfs (solid-colored) – the darker the better! In the past few years, she has added Louisianas, spurias, and all sizes of bearded irises – miniature, dwarf, border, intermediate, and tall. She said that she is attempting to figure out which kinds will grow best for her. Joyce reported that she does still buy irises, "unfortunately." She has lots of NOIDs, including the ones from her sister. She mentioned that she would not discard any irises which were not performing well, just in case they might decide to do better later.

Her best tip? If plants are not doing well, always look to the soil first (per her Master Gardener knowledge). Good-quality compost is an excellent remedy. - SC

Editor's Message - In the spirit of sharing, learning, and building community, I interview members of our group about their iris gardens. These interviews are then featured in the newsletter. This is our first new interview since March 2019 and I am hoping to revive the custom. Please contact me at taisnewsletter@yahoo.com if you wish to be interviewed. I will e-mail you a list of questions. You can call me on the phone (or chat before a meeting). I will take notes and then write an article.



Photos of two of Joyce's well-traveled NOIDs. Rodents made off with their name tags.

Treasurer's Report for November - submitted by Martin Juarez

Beginning Balance					\$6,303.54	
Date	Pd	MOP	Deposits	Expenses		
01/13/22	X		\$63.00			DUES *
01/30/22	X		\$223.00			DUES **
Totals			\$286.00	\$0.00	\$286.00	
Ending Balance					\$6,589.54	1/31/2022
2021 beginning balance \$5716.00, 2021 ending balance \$6303.54; Gain \$587.54						
* Clark \$13/#1581, Ellis \$10/#1098, Kelly \$10/#387, Knill \$10/\$4942, Schaefer \$10/#3699, Skerston \$10/#1223.						
** Swartz \$10/#1182, Clark/Smith \$63/#1584 (Stinchfield/Coates \$13, Hook \$10, Crawford \$10, Pavlovich \$10, Carruthers \$20), Fernandes \$10/#5080, Long \$10/#11497, McConnaughey \$10/#2845, Brian \$10/#1716, Powers \$10/#575, Marron/Briggs \$20/#3427, Andrews \$30/#1185, Andrews \$50/#1186.						
Check #s 1924/\$25 and 1925/\$140 from December 2021 to/for Region 15 still have not cleared.						

Species Irises, Part X: *Iris unguicularis* & its cultivars

A different type iris has come upon our radar. Kevin sent me a photo of an iris that was flowering at the Tucson Botanical Garden on Dec 30! Several of them were blooming when we had our meeting there on Jan 8.

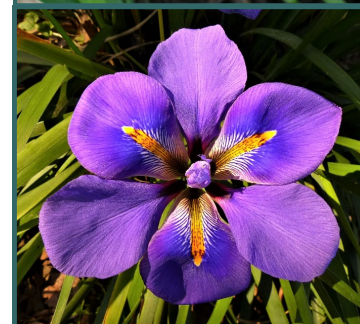
Iris unguicularis (un-gwih-kew-LAR-iss) is also known as the Winter Iris and the Algerian Iris. Native to Greece, Turkey, western Syria, and Tunisia, it grows on rocky hills and scrub land in those areas. It is rhizomatous and forms clumps that are about 12" tall. Leaves are evergreen, narrow, and somewhat leathery. Flowers cover the whole range of purple from lilac to blue violet, all with a yellow blaze on the falls. The very fragrant blossoms are 2-3" across and in most types, appear fairly low in the clump. *I. unguicularis* blooms from late fall to early spring, so would be a welcome addition to our landscapes. They make wonderful cut flowers, as well. Buds are frost resistant, but not the blossoms. It is a medicinally important plant, producing antioxidants and an alpha-glucosidase enzyme inhibitor which may eventually be used to help diabetics. Like all irises, it is poisonous if ingested.

This iris is widely cultivated in temperate regions and there are numerous cultivars for gardens, probably for the novelty of a winter-blooming iris. It does not mind shade and is particularly attractive in shady areas. Consider mass plantings in any of the following areas - rock gardens, flower borders and beds, and along walls. *I. unguicularis* prefers well-draining soil that is alkaline or neutral. Even a dry, stony area works. This plant tends to sulk when moved or divided, but will recover. It is drought-tolerant but does need occasional moisture. Pests include snails, slugs, caterpillars, and gray mold. Remove dried foliage and flower stems.

The cultivar '[Mary Barnard](#)' won the Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Garden Merit. Various cultivars are available from Rick Tasco of [Superstition Gardens](#), [Secret Gardens Growers](#), and [Plant Delights Nursery](#).

The Royal Horticultural Society has named *I. unguicularis* one of the top 200 plants of the last 200 years. Why not give it a try? - SC

Sources: Wikipedia article on [Iris unguicularis](#), [Alpine Garden Society Plant Encyclopedia](#), [Royal Horticultural Society website](#), [Gardenia.net](#), [North Carolina Extension Gardener Toolbox](#), World of Iris [blog post](#) of 4 Feb 2017 by Bryce Williamson



From top: *Iris unguicularis* at the Tucson Botanical Gardens on Dec 30, 2021 (photo by Kevin Kartchner), 'Dazzling Eyes' (Tasco 2004) and 'Winter Echoes' (Tasco 2011) (both photos from Superstitioniris.com), and 'Francis Wolseley' (photo from Plant Delights Nursery website). It appears that the one at TBG might be 'Dazzling Eyes.'



TAIS OFFICERS, ETC. FOR 2022

Kevin Kartchner - President

Bonnie Else - Vice President

Sue Clark – Secretary, Signatory on Account

Martin Juarez – Treasurer, Asst. Secretary

Diane Pavlovich & Sally Vega - Programs & Publicity

Joyce Knill & Sandy Ellis - 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 during February:

From January through April, iris plants put up 90% of their growth, so they need more water during this active growth period.
- from Darol Jurn

If you are following Susan Schaefer's method, fertilize irises weekly with Super Bloom or equivalent (middle number 50 or higher) mixed according to directions on package. If you are following Adam from TBG's organic method, continue applying fish emulsion every two weeks and humic acid as desired.

Remove dead leaves, debris, and any aphids.



Tip Exchange

Hummingbird Food - Seasonal Tweaks

Although we may have plenty of flowers in our gardens chosen for their appeal to hummingbirds, these winged jewels do enjoy supplemental food from a hummingbird feeder. According to Sheri L. Williamson, author of *The Peterson Field Guide to Hummingbirds of North America* and co-founder and director of the Southeastern Arizona Bird Observatory, the currently-recommended ratio of 1 part white sugar to 4 parts water has been around since 1963 when Augusto Ruschi, a Brazilian naturalist, claimed that this ratio matched that in his garden flowers. Sheri suggested that hummers benefit from a slightly *more concentrated mixture* during the cold months since the birds burn more energy to stay warm: **1 part sugar to 3 parts water**. I tried this in early January and have since adjusted to using it in only one feeder. Sheri also suggested a **1 to 5 ratio** in at least one of your feeders in summer, since water is more important than energy in the heat. And no dyes, no commercial nectars, no pesticides, and keep feeders clean! - SC Source: "[The Best Hummingbird Nectar Recipe has a History!](#)" via [Hummingbird Spot](#)

Iris Limerick:

I once saw a garden so fine
And, oh, how I wished it were mine!
So I learned some more stuff.
(It wasn't so tough).
Now mine is a garden quite fine.
- Sue Clark



AIIS Iris Wiki

Did You Know?

There are ethereal "flowers" made of ice and they are called **frost flowers**. These form when the



ground is not frozen but the air is frigid. When the sap in a stem expands, long thin cracks appear. Water is drawn out by capillary action and freezes in a cotton-candy-like or ribbon-like arrangement upon reaching the air. A touch of sun and they are gone! Source: [Frost Flowers | Garden Design](#)

"Let us love winter, for it is the spring of genius." - *Pietro Aretino*



A Little Bit of Botany and Iris History

More and more people grew irises in their gardens as the 20th century dawned and progressed. Henri Correvon (1854-1939) of Switzerland wrote several books on botany and gardening, including one on irises with H. Massé in 1907 - [Les Iris dans les Jardins](#) (Iris in Gardens). Correvon, who was the leading expert on Alpine plants, ran a nursery with his sons and planted stunning Alpine gardens, including the [Linnaea Alpine Garden](#) in Bourg-Saint-Pierre, Switzerland in 1889. The garden features over 300 plant species. Correvon received the Veitch Memorial Medal in 1924.

The first American to begin hybridizing irises was Bertrand Farr, who was featured in our newsletters of [Nov 2018](#), [Dec 2018](#), and [Jan 2019](#). Farr (1863-1924), who was born in Vermont, established a music business in Iowa. When this did not fair well, he moved to Philadelphia to teach music. Following the school's closure, he relocated to Reading and then to the brand-new town of Wyomissing, Pennsylvania. He had loved plants and especially irises since childhood and had created his own flower garden within the family's vegetable garden. In Wyomissing, Farr's gardens of irises and peonies overflowed his property, so he rented lots all around town in order to make more flower gardens. This was not surprising, since he had resolved to grow every variety of those plants that he could lay his hands on. In 1908, he opened a nursery in Wyomissing. He introduced his first irises the following year, including 'Quaker Lady,' 'Wyomissing' (photo above), and 'Juniata,' all of which are still grown. Farr's catalog was called *Farr's Hardy Plant Specialties*. He imported the best irises of the day to grow and use as breeding stock. People flocked to see his iris gardens. When hybridizer Sydney Mitchell of California realized that Farr's iris collection dwarfed his own, he wrote, "There is no doubt that the gathering together of this collection and its most attractive listing were primarily responsible for the interest in tall bearded irises that developed in America in the first quarter of the present [last] century." Bertrand Farr served as President of the American Peony Society for eight years and as director of the American Iris Society from 1920-1924. When he died in 1924, it was thought that he had the largest collection of irises in the United States - 1200 varieties! - SC

Sources: "Prologue to 1920," by Bob Pries in *The Early Years - Supplement 1 of 4 to IRISES*, AIS Bulletin, 2020; and *Classic Irises and the Men and Women Who Created Them* by Clarence E. Mahan