

TAIS Newsletter

Tucson Area Iris Society - established 1965

Our 57th year

An Affiliate of the American Iris Society



'Interpol'
(Plough, 1972)

Marcusen Sculpture Garden,
Prescott, Arizona

Photo by Sue Clark, 2022

President's Message

It's still Thanksgiving for me. I'm very grateful for all of our TAIS members. It is a lot of work (and fun) to keep an organization like ours going. From the new members just learning about iris, to the board and committee members that contribute so much, and to everyone that supports our many activities, and to the longtime members that have passed on: most recently Greta and Lucille - thank you all.

It was 26° at my house last night. Four varieties of iris that were trying to rebloom were frozen and their efforts were wasted. But my string beans became part of Thanksgiving dinner!

- Kevin Kartchner

"Yule is when the dark half of the year relinquishes to the light half. Starting the next morning at sunrise, the sun climbs just a little higher and stays a little longer in the sky each day. Known as Solstice Night, or the longest night of the year, much celebration was to be had as the ancestors awaited the rebirth of the Oak King, the Sun King, the Giver of Life that warmed the frozen Earth and made her to bear forth from seeds protected through the fall and winter in her womb. Bonfires were lit in the fields, and crops and trees were "wassailed" with toasts of spiced cider." - [Yule Lore](#)



Inside this issue:

- Memories: Greta & Lucille 2
- Photos from the November potluck 3
- Treasurer's Report 4
- [Iris japonica](#) - article and photos 4
- What to do in the Iris Garden for December 5
- Iris Limerick, Did You Know? 5
- Tips, Bit of Botany and Iris History 5

We recently learned of the passing of Lucille Skerston, long-time TAIS member in January of this year. She was 94. See her obituaries [here](#) and [here](#).

Upcoming Events

No meeting in December

Next meeting: Saturday, January 14, 1 PM, Eckstrom-Columbus library, topic TBA

February 11 meeting: 1 PM, Kevin on Irises

Birthday Wishes to:

Madeleine Glaser

Cathy Pane-Scire

Jonathan Dunnigan

Suzanne Hughes

Becky Clark

● Best wishes to Tony Kutz on his recent hospitalization



Iris japonica

Some Memories of Greta Dunnigan 1932-2022

Greta always attended meetings and shared her iris-growing tips freely with all. She was a tireless worker at our shows and sales. It was an honor to know both Lucille and Greta. - Madeleine Glaser

Greta was a constant contributor to TAIS and served on the board for many years. She was heavily involved in maintaining the iris beds at TBG that we know and love. At one point she was helping with potting and growing 270(!) iris for TAIS. - Kevin Kartchner

I met Greta at a dig about a month after Dave and I joined TAIS in 2016. Several members helped Gordon Jensen divide his iris, the excess going to our rhizome sale that weekend. Greta sorted all of the newly-dug rhizomes at Gordon's house - ones that were large enough for the sale and others that were not.

She was featured in an interview of TAIS iris growers in our November 2017 newsletter, in which she confessed that her favorite irises were not tall bearded, but arils. Read the interview [here](#). Greta's best tip? Try this as an experiment: Don't trim iris leaves into 6" fans. Probably just the outer two leaves will yellow and die back and the others can continue to photosynthesize. - Sue Clark

Some Memories of Lucille Skerston 1927-2022

I remember working with Lucille at our annual rhizome dig and preparation. She was fun to spend time with and always had a hilarious quip to make an otherwise tiring work party into a light-hearted get-together. I miss her sense of humor and work ethic. It was an honor to know both Lucille and Greta. - Madeleine Glaser

I knew something was amiss this year when Lucille was not at our rhizome sale. She attended our meetings as often as possible and our flower shows. I appreciated that she usually voted for whatever white iris I brought into the show. I enjoyed her sense of humor. She often asked about my daughter who was a youth member of TAIS over 20 years ago. - Kevin Kartchner

I recall Lucille as being interesting, kind, and funny. At one of our iris shows, she and another member were chatting about whether one might have coffee with a man without it leading to anything else. Dave was enjoying some of the provided lunch while seated beside these two. Lucille turned to him and asked if he would consider going out for coffee. The other person grabbed her arm, and said, "That's Sue's man!" Lucille, unabashed, apologized, "Oh, sorry, I didn't know that you were Sue's man!" - S. Clark & D. Smith

Throughout our many years of membership in the TAIS Lucille was a special friend. Quick witted and at times displaying a droll sense of humor, she was entertaining company. Lucille efficiently handled the duties of cashier at our yearly iris rhizome sales. She tabulated results of public votes for our Iris Shows and was a volunteer for many committee projects. Tony, Lucille and I had October birthdays. Though weeks apart she quipped: we were practically triplets. She's in our memory for years to come. - Melania Kutz



2016 Show

TAIS November Potluck - thank you to all participants for the yum!



And especially thank you to Bonnie for graciously hosting us!



Photos by Sue Clark



Treasurer's Report for November - submitted by Jim Wilcoxon

The Treasurer's position is still in the transition process for access to the account.



Left:
'Ledger's
Variety'
([Carroll's
irises](#)).
Note the
yellow
crests.

Right:
'Skirt
Chaser'
([Plant
Delights
website](#))



Species Irises, Part XIV: Another Crested Iris - *I. japonica*

The two crested irises featured last month, *Iris tectorum* and *I. milesii*, are the only hardy ones in the bunch. The rest take more care to grow, but it can be done if proper conditions are provided. We'll look at a popular one this month.

I. japonica is also known as the fringed iris, shaga (in Japan), or the butterfly flower (in China). It is native to Japan, China, Myanmar, and Burma, where it is found in temperate and tropical areas. There is an interesting historical note attached to *I. japonica*. Hilltop castles in Japan were typically surrounded by masses of these irises planted along the surrounding slopes. Their ground-level mats of 12"-long evergreen leaves were slippery and served to hinder any enemies attempting to sneak up on the castle, thus allowing the defenders to be prepared for the attack. This plant is still valued as a source of starch in Japan and in herbal medicines in China.

The 2"-wide flowers are flattish and generally white with yellow crests and blue markings. Some types have pale blue or lavender blooms with orange crests. Individual blossoms are short-lived, but each plant flowers for about a month in late spring. *I. japonica* is best grown in a cool greenhouse - besides being tender, its leaves tend to be a detraction at flowering time, as they look ragged if grown outdoors. This plant is hardy in Zones 7-10 and is commonly cultivated in the US and UK, preferring moist and shady conditions. It may be raised outdoors in warmer climates and is often planted as a ground cover, in mixed borders, or in containers. *I. japonica* will rot if it receives too much water. Pests include slugs.

Many varieties are available, including 'Ledgers Variety,' which is hardier than the species. 'Variegata' is worth growing for the lovely leaves with wide ivory or yellow margins. It does not flower well. 'Skirt Chaser' is available from the [Plant Delights website](#), where it is reported to spread via rhizomes into a 6' patch in six years. This type blooms for two months on 18" stems. More on other Crested iris species next month! - SC

From top: *Iris japonica*: in Japan (by Apple2000), in Japan with several stems visible (by KENPEI) (both on Wikipedia), leaves (growplants.org), and 'Variegata' (RHS)

Sources: Wikipedia article "*Iris japonica*," [Plant Delights website](#), [RHS](#), and [growplants.org](#)



TAIS OFFICERS, ETC. FOR 2023

Kevin Kartchner - President

David Sliffe - Vice President

Sue Clark – Secretary, Signatory on Account

Jim Wilcoxon – Treasurer, Asst. Secretary

Diane Pavlovich & Sally Vega - Programs & Publicity

**Cindy Long, Linda Briggs, Kathleen Marron,
and Evelyn Jacobs - Hospitality**

Bonnie Else and Susan Schaefer - Door Prizes

Taffy Holvenstot - Membership

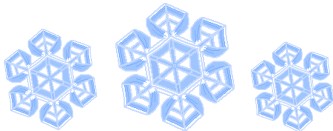
Dave Smith - Photography

Sue Clark - Newsletter

What to do in the Iris Garden in December:

If you didn't do it last month, create or update the map of your iris beds or containers, just in case labels fade or go missing. Replace faded labels.

Continue feeding with fish emulsion every other week. You could buy some Scott's [Super Bloom](#) (12-55-6), [Miracle-Gro Bloom Booster](#) (10-52-10) or [Ferti-lome Blooming & Rooting](#) (9-58-8) to get ready for feeding from January to June. These are available at Harlow's, Mesquite Valley Growers, Ace Hardware, Amazon, and other places.



Tip Exchange

The skin on my hands gets very dry starting in late September and lasting through the winter. I recently found some hand cream that helps. **O'Keeffe's Working Hands** comes in two formulas: regular (day) and night. I am using both and what a difference! Even a split on my thumb is healing. The cream absorbs well and is not greasy. Only a pea-sized dab is needed. I found it on Amazon. Check it out [here](#). - SC

Iris poem:

Winter came early
While plants snuggled underground,
Resisting its frosty grip
- Sue Clark



Original AIS seal

Did You Know?

"Black pansies, black dahlias, black petunias, black Baccara roses, black Halfeti roses [and black irises] all have something in common. None of them are black! In fact, there is no such thing as a truly black flower. Some flowers in very dark purples or reds are marketed as black, because the idea of a black flower is very popular. Why? Because we all want what we can't have!" (Missouri Star Quilt Company email of 16 Sept 2022)
Schreiner's Iris Gardens has several [black irises](#) in their line-up: 'Anvil of Darkness' (Innerst 1998), 'Black is Black' (2010), 'Black Suited' (Innerst 2000), 'Hello Darkness' (1992), and 'Here Comes the Night' (2009) to name a few. Source: Schreiners website

*"The sun does not shine for a few trees and flowers,
but for the wide world's joy." – Henry Ward Beecher*

A Little Bit of Botany and Iris History

The young American Iris Society needed an official seal and B. Y. Morrison was just the man for the job. The seal would be used on the Society's publications and documents, as well as indicate the legal presence of the organization. Benjamin Yoe Morrison, who was something of a Renaissance man, poured through old texts and records searching for designs relating to the iris in mythology and art. He found a woodcut illustration of a clump of irises in an Italian book, [Herbolario Volgare](#) (from 1522), and was struck by the powerful simplicity of the design. He modified the image to best fit in a circular seal by omitting the stork and swirling water at the bottom of the clump of what must be *Iris pseudacorus*. A rainbow arches over the top border of the circle to represent Iris, the Greek goddess of the rainbow. See drawing above. Morrison described his role in creating the seal as a compiler rather than a designer, in acknowledgement of the symbols used were not original work on his part.

B. Y. Morrison, who excelled in art, music, literature, and science earned a Masters' Degree in Landscape Architecture from Harvard in 1915. He spent a year in Japan, studying their art and architecture, and returned to the US to work for the Department of Agriculture. In 1926, he wrote and illustrated a Farmer's Bulletin for them: [Garden Irises, #1406](#). B. Y. served as President of the American Horticultural Society and as editor and illustrator of their journal. He was the American Iris Society's Secretary and Editor through the 1930's. You might think that he would not have time for anything else, but he was renowned as a plant hybridizer and served as the designer and first director of the [United States National Arboretum](#) in Washington, DC. Highlights of this Arboretum include a collection of bonsai including a white pine which survived the bombing of Horoshima, a grove featuring the state trees of all 50 states, an installation of the columns from the eastern portico of the US Capital building (from 1828 to 1958), and a National Herb Garden. - SC

Sources: "The American Iris Society Seal" by Anner Whitehead in *The Early Years - Supplement 1 of 4 to IRISES, AIS Bulletin, 2020*; and Wikipedia article, "United States National Arboretum"