

TAIS Newsletter

Tucson Area Iris Society - established 1965

Our 58th year

An Affiliate of the American Iris Society



'Lemon Pledge'
(Spears, 2003)

(it has a lemon fragrance)

Marcusen Sculpture Garden,
Prescott, Arizona

Photo by Sue Clark, 2022

President's Message

Here we are with only a month and a half until THE show. My iris have a lot of growing to do to get ready, but this month's meeting will prepare us for the show. In addition to bringing your best correctly-identified stalks to the show, ensure that they are labeled and entered in the correct section. The tall bearded are in section A while the historic (introduced prior to 1994) are in section E. For me, that means that some of my all-time favorites and Dykes winners, Thornbird '89 and Mesmerizer '91, belong in section E (and not in section A: Tall Bearded). Enjoy the rains, the blooms are coming.

- Kevin Kartchner

"Now say to yourself five times, and believe it...This is March. The main thing to do in March is to don't. I don't dare do much in my garden...because I know this old fellow March, he fools me every time." - Alfred Carl Lottes, BLEG garden editor, 1933

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Upcoming Events

Next meeting: March 11 at 1 PM at the Ward 6 Council offices, 3202 E 1st St (south of Speedway, east of Tucson Blvd. - note different location). Topic: AIS Show information: English Box, etc. - Terry Swartz

April 22: TAIS Iris Show, Trinity Presbyterian Church, 400 E. University Blvd. Bring and set-up your irises from 6-9:30 AM. RSVP required to Terry if bringing arrangement(s). Free public viewing from 1-4 PM

Birthday Wishes to:

Kristee West	Martin Juarez	Sharm Gregoire
Joyce Knill	Sandy Ellis	Kathy Smith
Cindy Long	Jim Ganem	Linda Ammon



February Meeting Minutes



11 Feb 2023 - Seventeen TAIS members gathered at the Murphy-Wilmot Library to hear Chad Harris from Mt. Pleasant Iris Farm speak (via Microsoft Teams) about *Iris ensata*, a species of Japanese iris. (See more on p. 3 and 4). Four members tuned in virtually.

General Business: Kevin completed paperwork and paid for both our non-profit status and our AIS affiliation. He suggested that TAIS members' contact information could be accessed within a password-protected portion of our website. No one was opposed to this option. Members can opt out by indicating this on the membership form. **Does anyone know who the administrator is of the TAIS Facebook account or how we can find out?** Door prizes of named irises were won by Kathleen Marron, Cindy Long, & David Sliffe.

Show: Diane made a poster to advertise this and will

distribute it to members for posting. We are allowed to sell potted irises at the venue, Trinity Presbyterian Church. Terry suggested that they sell for \$10 each. He has 22 and Sue has one. **Anyone else?** He mentioned that volunteers can have lunch with the judges in a room on the main floor of the church. Sue will do the tallying at the show. She emailed the show schedule to all members. Awards will be AIS rosettes and ribbons, as well as TAIS Iris Bucks. RSVP if you are bringing an arrangement so that Terry can plan enough space to display these.

Sale: Kevin will order half of the rhizomes from Sutton's, who offers clubs 50% off of pre-2017 irises that are ordered in groups of five. He offered to let members choose which irises are ordered. They are to let him know via email in one week. Several people agreed to do this.

‘IRIS
INTRIGUE’ IS
THE NAME OF
OUR SHOW



We're on the web:

Tucsoniris.org

Board Meeting: Various expenses were approved by motion. \$1000 for the Show: Sue motioned and Kathleen Marron seconded. \$450 for the Auction rhizomes: Susan motioned and Diane seconded. \$1200 for the Sale rhizomes (\$600 order from Sutton's by Kevin and \$600 order from Mid-America by Sue): Sally motioned and Terry seconded. Kevin asked if members would like to have the option of paying their dues by PayPal. They did not. (I would). He asked if we thought we should get a device (Square) to allow us to accept credit cards at our sale. It may cost around \$200 for the Square. Someone will research it.

Sue has submitted a summary of our events and some photos for the semi-annual Region 15 Bulletin. Any officer who has joined AIS, please send proof of same to Jim for reimbursement. Diane is pursuing having a Tucson weatherman speak to our club in May. She enjoyed his presentation at a rose society meeting. The hospitality team asked if they should submit receipts or put out a tip jar. Kevin said to submit receipts.

Thank you to Terry who suggested our speaker this month. - Sue Clark, secretary



February Meeting photo by Kevin Kartchner



Photos from Chad Harris' presentation on *Iris ensata*



And in Two Years You May See This



LOTS TO SHARE IN JUST TWO YEARS



Iris ensata - notes from Chad Harris' presentation

There are seven species of iris native to Japan, one of them being *Iris ensata*, so that simply saying "Japanese iris" is not specific enough of a term. Many people still refer to this species by its previous name of *Iris kaempferi*.

Chad has grown *I. ensata* for over 40 years. He lives on an 80-acre farm near Portland, Oregon. They were not easy to find back when he fell in love with them. Someone pointed him in the direction of Aitken's Salmon Creek Iris (which happens to be not far from him) and to Lorena Reid, who had five acres of *I. ensata*.

This species blooms after the other irises have faded, between spring and summer. They have grass-like foliage and are big and tall plants, reaching to the chest of 6' 2" Chad. See photo on p. 3. He reported that they grow from knee-high to chest-high in a matter of three weeks in early summer!



CULTURE:

Temperature: *I. ensata* is native to Japan, China, Korea, and northern Russia, so is quite cold-hardy. If grown in more temperate areas, it requires a period of winter chill, the length of which has not been determined. Their hardiness in hot temperatures has also not been studied. For these two reasons, Chad mentioned that growing them in Tucson was "pushing it," and he gave a nod to TAIS member Terry Schwartz who has been [successfully cultivating them](#) for years. Chad also has customers growing them well in central Texas.

Compost: each plant requires about one cubic yard of compost at the time of planting. Chad prefers composted steer manure, which he tills in deeply. It has to last the plant 2-3 years.

Water: Chad irrigates with overhead sprinklers, applying 2-3" of water once a week, which sinks in to a depth of 6". *I. ensata* is not a water iris - it is a marginal plant and can only survive in water if its crown remains 6" above the water's surface.



Increases and division: this species grows quite differently than other irises. During the first year, eight increases is common. During year 2, each of these can have 6-8 increases, for a total of 48-64. In year 3, the total jumps to 96-192, and the plant begins to decline due to over-crowding. It needs to be divided, as the new rhizomes have nowhere for their roots to go. By year 4, it might have 192-576 increases. So it is important to have friends to give these away to! After the second or third year, the plant is much more difficult to divide, but prior to third, it can be pulled apart. Chad divides in August after the summer growth.

Planting: plant rhizomes 2-3" deep. Chad prefers watering them in instead of backfilling. For the first week or two, keep them moist but not wet. They may need daily watering during this interval. *I. ensata* can grow 1" per day!

Color range: red-violet, blue-violet, and alba (white)

Growing in containers: They do well in containers, and need big pots since they are big plants. One gallon is the minimum size, and 3-5 gallon pots are better. Chad suggests that black plastic nursery pots be placed within ceramic pots to help insulate the plants from heat from the sun, which might "cook" the roots otherwise.

Bloom: the first year in a pot, each plant will typically have 1-2 blooms, each lasting 2-3 days. In the ground, 2- and 3-year-old plants will bloom for about two weeks.

Foliage: the leaves die back in winter, at which point Chad cuts them down to 2-3".

Miscellaneous tips: lime and bone meal are fatal to *I. ensata*. Beware - *I. pseudacorus* is often sold as *I. ensata*. This is the invasive yellow iris which can grow in water and in the garden.

Visit Mt. Pleasant Iris Farm: the last two weeks of June through the first week of July is their peak season. Chad even grows some historic varieties of *I. ensata* from Japan.

Other gardens: Dell Perry and Judy Schneider have wonderful displays of *I. ensata* in Texas.

Tucson: they will likely need morning sun and afternoon shade in this type of climate.

Summary: *I. ensata* loves rich soil kept evenly moist, and a winter-chill period. - SC, from my notes

Treasurer's Report for February - submitted by Jim Wilcoxon

Beginning checkbook balance (1 Feb 2023) 6962.80

FEB INCOME YEAR TO DATE

Dues-----	145.00-----	636.00
Plant Sales		
Show		
Auction		
Donation		
Other		
TOTAL-----	145.00-----	636.00

FEB EXPENSES YEAR TO DATE

Program-----	0.00-----	0.00
Plant (etc) purchases-----	3.35-----	959.73
Show-----	104.00-----	104.00
Feed, (etc)-----	0.00-----	13.87
Admin-----	120.00-----	642.70
TOTAL-----	1067.55-----	1720.30
Ending checkbook balance (28 Feb 2023)		6048.95
Petty Cash-----		+8.70
Net-----		6057.65
Change-----		913.85



From Top: *Asclepias incarnata* (by R. A. Nonenmacher) (Swamp milkweed) and *Cleome hassleriana* (by K Hari Krishnan) (Spider flower) - both from Wikimedia



Annuals for the Tucson-area Garden, Part II: Warm-season by Joyce Knill

When Sue asked me to write an article about summer annuals which would thrive in Tucson's heat, the snow was melting in my backyard. It's always good to dream!

If you enjoy growing annuals from seed, you should start them immediately. A heat mat and grow lights will improve your success rate. I start mine in a multi-cell seed starting tray filled with a seed starting mix. Some annual seeds need to be near the surface for light, and others need to be buried in the soil, as they only germinate in darkness. Read the plant package carefully. If you have difficulty finding supplies, Burpee.com is a good place to start.

If planting directly in the ground, a good quality compost should be dug in a couple of weeks before setting out plants, and the irrigation checked. Remember to change the irrigation control battery annually.

When choosing annuals, pick the color most pleasing to you and build on that. Yellows and blues are a good pair, and reds and whites are striking. Most annuals complete their life cycle in one year, but many will happily reseed if conditions are favorable. Generally speaking, to optimize color, annuals need to be dead-headed regularly and fertilized at least once a month with a high phosphate number (middle number). Super Bloom is a good choice.

Don't forget that containers are an easy way to grow annuals. When temps reach 110°, you can move those pots into partial shade. Containers should be at least 18" in diameter, with many drain holes in the base. Plastic often becomes too hot in our summer heat and can actually 'cook' plant roots. Look for double-walled plastic, Styrofoam, clay, or Mexican pots which will keep the roots cooler than single-walled plastic. Estate sales are a great place to shop for pots.

If you have a partially-shady spot, look for **balsam, celosia, coleus, four o'clocks, lisianthus, thunbergia (a vine), ornamental pepper, nierembergia, cardinal climber (a vine), or bidens** in your favorite nursery.

If planting a sunny garden, look for **cosmos, sunflower, marigolds, rudbeckia, coreopsis, cleome, portulaca, purslane, sweet potato vine, zinnia, Angelonia, asclepias, vinca, tithonia, gomphrena, verbena, Mexican hat, pincushion flower, statice, strawflower, and some salvias**. Many of these flowers will also attract butterflies and are available in an assortment of colors. For variety, seeds and plants can be found in Home Depot and Lowes, but also check local nurseries such as Harlow's, Mesquite Valley, Green Things, and Ace Hardware. Can't find the perfect plant or color, try websites for Burpee, Park Seeds, Ferry-Morse or Eden Brothers.

For the fun of it, you can also try a little companion planting. If you plant **garlic** or **onions** around flowers, they will repel aphids as well as fungal diseases. **Geraniums** will attract and trap leaf hoppers near your tomato plants. **Sunflowers** appeal to and trap aphids and **zinnias** will entice hummingbirds who love to eat whiteflies. **French marigolds** (not all marigolds) help control nematodes and cutworms in the soil and above ground will trap spider mites.

When choosing annuals, keep in mind that some annuals are bi-annuals and others just want to be perennials. If a plant passes during the heat of the summer, consider it as an opportunity to try a different flower - maybe a new iris will be perfect for that spot!



From top: *Thunbergia*, *lisianthus*, *Bidens cernua*, *Scabiosa columaria* 'Pink Mist' (often called pincushion flower), and *Tithonia* (Mexican Sunflower) - all from Wikipedia

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 - Photographer
- Sue Clark - Newsletter



What to do in the Iris Garden during March:

Keep area free of leaves, weeds, and aphids.

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

If you are following Susan Schafer’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.



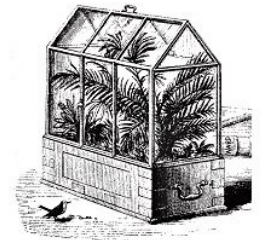
Tip Exchange

Kevin has started using Super Glue to seal cracks in his thumbs. He guided glue into the cracks with a sewing needle, and they healed within ten days without any pain. He bought the Super Glue at DollarTree, where they offer two tubes for \$1.25.

I recently found another brand of high phosphorus fertilizer that seems to be a good price - [Schultz Bloom Plus](#) (10-54-10). It comes as a powder that you dissolve in water, as with SuperBloom, etc. You only use 1 tsp/gallon, so the box lasts a long while. It also contains these micronutrients: boron, copper, iron, manganese, zinc, and molybdenum. - SC

Iris Limerick:

There was a young man named Lou
 Who always hummed “Toodle-de-do.”
 He fertilized his soil
 And on it did toil,
 And his irises were all shades of blue.
 - Sue Clark



a Wardian case

Did You Know?

When bees fly into a flower for nectar, they inadvertently collect pollen and transfer it to the next blossom they visit. Once a pollen grain lands on the stigma of a flower, a pollen tube grows out of it and extends down through the style until it reaches the ovary. Male cells travel through the tube and join female cells in the eggs in the ovary. Seeds develop. [In irises, these bee-fertilized seeds are held in pods known as “bee-pods.”] - SC Source: Wikipedia article on “Pollination”

“The older I grow, the more do I love spring and spring flowers.” - Emily Dickinson



A Little Bit of Botany and Iris History

Last month we learned that *Iris variegata* and *I. pallida* were the two foundation species of the tall bearded iris, a “manufactured marvel.” The former is smaller, deciduous, and thrives in rainy summers and snowy winters. *I. pallida* is tall, evergreen, and prefers hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters.

By the 19th century, the idea of having a garden moved beyond the realm of royalty and monasteries and into the mainstream. People and goods were traveling faster and further - by steamships and trains. Even live plants could be safely transported for long distances, oftentimes in Wardian cases, which were an early type of terrarium. Also during this time, botanical gardens became important and commercial plant nurseries came into being to supply a growing market for flora. All of this set the stage for the next steps in the creation of the modern tall bearded iris.

An International Conference on Irises in Paris in June 1922 drew iris aficionados from around the world, including John C. Wister, president of the newly-created American Iris Society. Scholarly papers were presented on all things iris: history, culture, hybridizing, and more. In 1923, these papers were published as a book, [Les Iris Cultivees](#). One section, prepared by Ernst Krelage of the Krelage nursery in Haarlem in the Netherlands, detailed the timeline of iris development. In this, he wrote that the iris called ‘Buriensis’ (de Bure, 1820) was the first named iris. He also reported that in 1601, Flemish botanist Charles de l’Ecluse noted that “...experience of many years has shown me that irises raised from seed vary in a remarkable fashion.”

You will likely recognize the names of these famous iris breeders, as they have been featured in this column over the years: [de Bure](#) from Belgium, [Jacques](#) and the [Verdiere](#) of France, and [Jean-Nicholas Lémon](#) of France who introduced 100+ varieties. These gentlemen all grew seeds from bee-pods (see Did You Know? above). - to be continued next month... - SC

Sources: “The Tall Bearded Iris, a Manufactured Marvel,” by Phil Edinger in The Early Years - Supplement 1 of 4 to IRISES, AIS Bulletin, 2020; Wikimedia; and [Wageningen University](#)