



December 2024

TAIS Newsletter

Tucson Area Iris Society - established 1965

Our 59th year

An Affiliate of the American Iris Society



'Solar Fire'
(Tasco, 2002)

Marcusen Sculpture Gardens,
Prescott, Arizona

Photo by Sue Clark, 2024

President's Message

It's a great time of year to be grateful. I'm grateful for so many of nature's beauties, especially flowers, and of course our remarkable iris. I often reflect on our TAIS iris family and the countless hours that so many of you put in to making it successful. As our iris are finally growing again, take a break and contemplate. Enjoy the holidays and we'll be back together again next year for even more TAIS adventures.

- Kevin Kartchner

"That's no December sky! Surely 'tis June Holds now her state on high, Queen of the noon. Only the tree-tops bare Crowning the hill, Clear-cut in perfect air, Warn us that still Winter, the aged chief, Mighty in power, Exiles the tender leaf, Exiles the flower..." - Robert Fuller Murray (1863-1894), A December Day

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Upcoming Events

Next meeting: January 11, 1 PM. Chuck Chapman on Broken Colors & Variations. Eckstrom-Columbus Library, 22nd Street and Columbus

February 4: Lynda Miller, hybridizer, speaking at the Sun Country Iris Society meeting, 7 PM. Meet & Greet at 6:30 PM. The Valley Garden Center, 1809 N. 15th Ave, Phoenix (two blocks north of McDowell)

April 25-26: Region 15 Spring Trek - "Spring Day in a Secret Garden," Redlands, California. Details TBA

June 2-7: AIS National Conference, Billings, Montana. Information at [Big Sky Iris Club](#)

Birthday Wishes to:

- Madeleine Glaser
- Cathy Pane-Scire
- Becky Clark
- Suzanne Hughes
- Jonathan Dunnigan



Source: Galleria Savaria

November Meeting Minutes



16 Nov 2024 - Eighteen people enjoyed a potluck at Bonnie's lovely home. She roasted a turkey and everyone brought side dishes and desserts to share. Although the day started out cool and cloudy, it was just right at lunchtime.

Many members brought seeds and plants to trade within the group. And Joyce and Bonnie dug and potted irises from Margie for every person there. Besides a couple of those, Dave and I came home with a small blue agave from Joyce, lupine seeds from Kevin and Sam, clippings of starfish- or carrion cactus from someone, and several Louisiana irises that Joyce and Bonnie dug for me at Margie's garden.

Kevin conducted a short meeting. Pat Olsen is engaging a hybridizer to speak about iris genetics at our January or February meeting. Bonnie moved that we cover his \$150 fee and Sally seconded. We all signed a get well card for Susan, who tripped and

fell at our last meeting, cracking her rotator cuff. Bonnie will deliver a doggie bag of desserts to her along with the card. In his annual "Year-in-Review" part of the meeting, Kevin highlighted our panel discussion on growing irises; Terry's presentation on arranging irises for the show; Pat's presentation on selecting, grooming, and transporting irises to the show; the show itself and the fact that we sold all of the potted irises there; his own talk on hybridizing; the auction, sale, and photo contest; and October's talk about fertilizing. Special thank yous were offered to Terry for chairing the show, Sue for chairing the Auction, and Joyce, Bonnie, and Kathy for chairing the sale. Officers and Board members were thanked as well: Cindy as VP; Sue as secretary & newsletter; Jim as treasurer; Diane and Sally for programs, places, and publicity; Linda, Cindy,

Kathleen Marron, and Evelyn for providing us with snacks; Taffy for membership, and Dave for photos. And we added a thanks to Kevin for serving as president.

Kristee will look into how to change the password for our Facebook page since it was started during her administration and no one knows how to get into the page top update it.

Linda will chair our 60th Anniversary Committee. Bonnie and Joyce offered to help her. Some ideas include: touring Bloomerang Iris Garden in Prescott, touring an iris-growing garden created by students and a teacher of Rio Rico High School, planting irises in a new community garden at Kristee's church, a catered lunch or brunch in Kevin's iris garden or TBG, purchasing rhizomes for active club members, and re-doing iris beds at Boyce Thompson Arboretum.

Pat is considering chairing a committee to look into hosting a Region 15 Fall Conference. Lois will help her. Lois and Leann spoke about last month's Conference or Trek in Prescott. (See photos and description in our October newsletter).

Kevin gave Sue and Dave certificates for their winning entries in our photo contest.

We offered a big thank you to Bonnie for hosting our potluck again this year!

We do not meet in December. Our next meeting is set for January 11 at the Eckstrom-Columbus Library.

- Sue Clark, secretary

**Any ideas for
celebrating our
60th anniversary
in 2025?**



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

November Potluck - photos by Dave Smith & one by Lois



Treasurer's Report for November - submitted by Jim Wilcoxon

15,082.14---Beginning balance 1 Nov 2024
 + 30.00---2 Dues
 15,112.14

EXP

29.37---Holiday party
 17.92----Plan ID Tags
102.60----Postage and Admin
 149.89

14,962.25 Ending Balance 30 Nov 2024



Fertilizer Information, continued

- Sawdust and shredded paper temporarily reduce nitrogen availability, so do not mix them directly into soil without composting them first
- Nitrogen fertilizers will be lost to the atmosphere if left on the soil's surface, so scratch them into the soil, water them in well, or mix them with irrigation water. The latter process is known as *fertigating* or *nutrigating*
- Another good strategy is to divide applications into smaller, monthly doses to avoid burning plants
- Miracle-Gro, with its 24-8-16 formulation is actually good for irises, despite having a rather higher nitrogen content than was suggested for irises. It increases their leaves, rhizomes, and roots. Strengthening nitrogen applications on 'Immortality' irises was studied by Xhao (2016). Even 0.3 grams/liter [0.04 oz/gal] caused a surge in flowers, roots, and leaves by weight. 1.2 g/l [0.16 oz/gal] showed the largest escalation in all aspects. [Note: for reference, there are 14.8 grams or 0.5 oz in a Tablespoon measure] - SC

Fertilizer Information from Dr. Walworth's presentation in October

- Iron, manganese, and zinc are necessary micronutrients
- Chelated iron, manganese, and zinc soil treatments typically last for one growing season before they must be reapplied
- These particular chelated formulations are best for treating alkaline soils such as ours: Fe-EDDHA, Mn-EDTA, and Zn-ETDA
- Iron (Fe) deficiencies are more common than Mn or Zn - all will exhibit as chlorosis of young leaves
- Nitrogen is often deficient in soil. It is the most-managed plant nutrient
- The first number listed on fertilizer packages is nitrogen. If it says 10 for example, that means that the fertilizer contains 10% plant-available nitrogen.
- Microbes break down organic matter in soil and release nitrogen that plants need, so add compost to garden soils and to pots
- Nearly all of our native non-riparian trees are legumes: mesquite, palo verde, acacia, and ironwood. Like all legumes, they cultivate microorganisms in their roots, and are thus able to access the nitrogen that these microorganisms capture from the atmosphere
- In monocots such as irises and grasses, nitrogen deficiency shows up in older leaves, which get yellow tips and midribs. In dicots, nitrogen deficiency presents as older leaves turning entirely yellow
- [Osmocote](#) is a good source of nitrogen. It is more expensive because it is formulated to release slowly
- Organic forms of nitrogen include compost and manure (be sure to age the latter before applying it to a bed or pot). These must be added repeatedly to supply nitrogen to plants
- Inorganic forms of nitrogen are types of salts and can damage plants if they are applied too heavily. These fertilizers are water soluble and thus are lost from soil quickly

(continued at top of next column)

More fertilizing tips next month

Beneficial Insects, Part VII: Soldiers, Assassins, & Robbers

We'll round out our study of helpful insects in the garden with a veritable rogue's gallery this month - Soldier Beetles, Assassin Bugs, and Robber Flies.

Soldier beetles are named after the red-coated uniforms of Revolutionary War-era British soldiers. These beetles are also known as leatherwings because their *elytra* or outerwings are soft. They eat many types of pests that damage food crops, including Mexican bean beetles, Colorado potato beetles, caterpillars, and aphids. It's the aphids and other small insects that they consume that makes them of interest to flower gardeners. They also eat nectar and pollen, so attract soldier beetles by growing goldenrod, Queen Anne's Lace, and other compound flowers. Their larva, known as velvet worms for their appearance, feed on small insects and insect eggs, snails, and other ground creatures that they can catch. The oldest-known fossil of a soldier beetle is from early Cretaceous amber in Spain (about 120 million years old). They are currently found all over the world, except for Antarctica.

Assassin bugs are members of a large family of true bugs with over 7,000 species distributed across the world. Most have a similar look: a sturdy build with an elongated head, narrow neck, and a proboscis or *rostrum* made of three segments. This appendage serves as a conduit for their venomous saliva, which dissolves the insides of their prey. These are then sucked out by the assassin bug. Many species are brightly colored, with red and orange being common. Mosquitos, flies, and beetles are their prey of choice, making them valuable allies in the garden. Some are ambush predators, while others actively hunt their prey using their keen eyesight and sense of smell. Assassin bugs are used as biological controls against cotton bollworm and experimentally against boll weevils, *Lygus* bugs (serious plant pests), and certain caterpillars. Assassin bug fossils date back to about 100 million years ago in Burmese amber from the late Cretaceous.

Robber flies are also known as assassin flies. Their 7,000 species are scattered around the world. The largest ones are about 2" long and the smallest 0.1". They tend to be hairy and prefer sunny, arid areas with scattered vegetation. Their diet consists of other flies, beetles, grasshoppers, as well as butterflies, moths, bees, spiders, dragonflies, and damselflies. Robber flies catch their prey on the wing. They eat the same way as the assassin bugs - jab, inject saliva, suck up the liquified insides of the victim. Their larvae are also predatory and eat insects and insect eggs. Robber flies date to the early Cretaceous. They can be recognized by the characteristic hairy fringe around their compound eyes. Next month, we'll look at beneficial wasps. - SC

Sources: Wikipedia articles: [Soldier beetle](#), [Reduviidae](#), [Asilidae](#); Wild Explained: [Assassin Bugs](#), Canadian Journal of Arthropod Identification: [Assassin Bug Key](#), BugGuide: [Soldier Beetles](#)



From top: Goldenrod soldier beetle ([U of MN Extension](#)), soldier beetle ([BugGuide](#)), two types of assassin bugs ([Assassin Bug Key](#)), robber fly ([by Kurt Kulac on Wikipedia](#)), robber fly with honey bee prey ([by Charles J. Sharp on Wikipedia](#))

TAIS OFFICERS, ETC. FOR 2025

Kevin Kartchner - President

Cindy Long - Vice President

Sue Clark – Secretary, Signatory on Account

Jim Wilcoxon – Treasurer, Asst. Secretary

Pat Olsen & Sally Vega - Programs & Places

Diane Pavlovich - 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 December:

Maintenance: If you have not done so, create or update a map of your iris beds or containers, just in case labels fade or go missing. Replace faded labels. Names are required when showing irises!

Organic care: Feed with fish emulsion every other week. Scratch in feather meal and alfalfa meal (or pellets) monthly. Apply humic acid as desired.

Non-organic care: Buy some Scott's **Super Bloom** (12-55-6), Miracle-Gro **Bloom Booster** (10-52-10), **Schultz Bloom Plus** (10-54-10), or Ferti-lome **Blooming & Rooting** (9-58-8) to get ready for feeding from New Year's through May. These are available at Harlow's, Mesquite Valley Growers, Ace Hardware, Amazon, and other places. TAIS member Susan starts applying this in early January; Kristee on Valentine's Day. - SC



Tip Exchange

In one of the research papers cited in Dr. Walworth's presentation, scientists in Brazil found that irises grown in soil lacking potassium (K) were more susceptible to soft rot caused by *Erwinia* bacteria species. Deficiencies in other macronutrients such as nitrogen (N), calcium (Ca), and phosphorus (P) resulted in decreased growth and fewer increases. The paper is illustrated with useful photos showing iris plants after each nutrient was withheld. - SC

Source: Rosa, et al, 2012, [Crescimento e sintomas de deficiência nutricional em Iris germanica L. decorrentes](#) (parts in English)

Iris Limerick

There once was a man named Joe
Who was very, very good with a hoe.
He planted lots of flowers
In only two hours,
That iris-loving man named Joe.
- Sue Clark



Japanese irises

Source: E!sy.com

Did You Know?

In 1925, the American Iris Society published two lists - one of 122 irises deemed worthy of propagation and the other of 220 irises deemed *unworthy* of propagation. Growers were encouraged to sell only those from the first list. Remember that there had been great confusion in the names in the genus *Iris* when AIS came into being in 1920, and they chose to "take a firm hand in organizing the field of iris hybridization at a time when the popularity of the iris was growing rapidly."

Source: "Evaluating a Little Iris History...by John T Black within the source below

"In seed-time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy."
-William Blake (1757-1827)

A Little Bit of Botany and Iris History

The irises with the largest flowers bloom about a month after the tall bearded. They are the Japanese irises, *Iris ensata*, and their flowers can be 12" in diameter! Japanese irises grow all over the Japanese archipelago, where they are known as *hanashōbu*. They can be found growing naturally in the surrounding areas of Manchuria, Northern China, Korea, and Siberia. Japanese irises, abbreviated JI, require acidic soils. Many areas where they previously grew have been lost by habitat destruction, mostly by conversion to farming or building.

Legend has it that Japanese irises were used to help keep track of seasonal time in the ancient days before Japan had a calendar. While cherry blossoms indicated that it was time to stop hunting and to start cultivating fields, iris bloom time heralded the start of the rainy season when rice plants had to be transplanted in gardens.

Wild Japanese irises are first mentioned in a book called *Shugyobushu* by Jien, who lived from 1155-1255. There is a record of them being cultivated from about 1500. A man named Matsudaira Shōō or Showo, who lived from 1773-1856, collected wild Japanese irises from the Asaka marshes and crossed them to produce over 120 new varieties. Several flower generations later, he developed some with double blooms.

There are three types of Japanese irises. 1. **Edo** varieties are grown in paddies near Tokyo and show great variety in size and form. Many Edo iris gardens were opened to the public after 1868. 2. **Ise** varieties were developed for culture in pots. Yoshi Sadagoro (1775-1859) improved this strain greatly. Ise irises have falls that hang downwards, standards that are pleasingly shaped and held at right angles to the falls, and finely-serrated crests. 3. **Higo** varieties are also developed for pot culture. Yoshido-Jannosuku studied with Matsudaira Shōō and later returned home with 64 Edo varieties. Groups began breeding them, jealously guarding their seeds and plants, until 1914 when Nishida Nebutsume began exporting plants to America and Europe. More on Japanese irises next month! - SC

Source: "The Japanese Iris," by Currier McEwen, Eleanor Westmeyer, W. W. Ouweneel, and Clarence Mahan in *AIS 100 Years Bold*, Supplement 2 of 5 to *IRISES: the Bulletin of AIS*, 2020; *The Japanese Iris*, C. McEwen, 1990