

January 2024

TAIS Newsletter

Tucson Area Iris Society - established 1965

Our 59th year

An Affiliate of the American Iris Society



'Silver Skates'
(Roberts, 1998)

Marcusen Sculpture Gardens,
Prescott, Arizona

Photo by Sue Clark, 2023

President's Message

A reflection on an amazing TAIS year... We had our first judged show in many years. Our rhizome sale exceeded all expectations and we helped TBG completely relocate their iris bed. At our meetings, we heard from a hybridizer, learned about iris forms and patterns, prepared for the show, auctioned newer introductions, had our photo contest, and traded plenty of seeds and plants at our delicious potluck. Thanks to everybody for contributing your substantial time and many talents.

We'll start off 2024 with the all-new TAIS library. So far there are seventeen books in the collection with lots of beautiful photos, culture information, and exploring iris that we don't usually grow here. Check one out at our January meeting. Your TAIS membership is your library card. It's going to be another great year of growing iris with TAIS.

- Kevin Kartchner

"January is the quietest month in the garden. But just because it looks quiet doesn't mean that nothing is happening. The soil, open to the sky, absorbs the pure rainfall while microorganisms convert tilled-under fodder into usable nutrients for the next crop of plants. The feasting earthworms tunnel along, aerating the soil and preparing it to welcome the seeds and bare roots to come." — Rosalie Muller Wright



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Upcoming Events

Next meeting: January 13, 1 PM, Eckstrom-Columbus Library. Panel discussion and Q&A about growing irises in the Tucson area

Hybridizer David Toth of Indian Creek Iris in Nebraska will speak in Phoenix at the Valley Garden Center on February 3 at 2 PM. Specialities are space-age & broken colors. Hosted by Sun Country Iris Society

Birthday Wishes to:

Maxine Fifer
Bonnie Else
Marilyn Jensen
Whitney Judd

Kathy Windischman
Nancy Hook
Michael Willing
Carol Gawrychowski



Iris alata

Iris alata, by E. von Regel, 1891,
Gartenflora magazine

Index to 2023 TAIS Newsletters

January 2023 – Photo: ‘Circus Stripes,’ **Index to 2022 Newsletters**; **More Crested Iris - *Iris wattii*, *I. confusa*** article and photos; blurb on **Dew, frost, fog, and clouds**; What to do in the Iris Garden this Month; **History: the re-designed AIS seal in 1958**; Haiku; Quotes: “There are two seasonal diversions that can ease the bite of any winter. One is the January thaw. The other is the seed catalogs” by Hal Borland and “And now let us welcome the new year, full of things that have never been.” by Rainer Maria Rilke

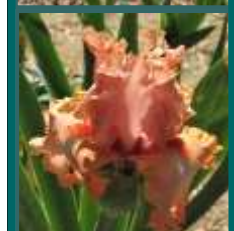
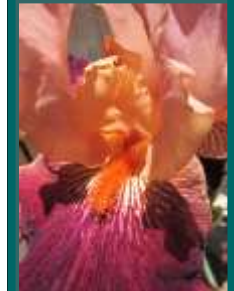
February 2023 – Photo: ‘Backdraft,’ January Meeting Minutes and photos; **Crested irises - *Iris formosana*, *I. gracilipes* or *I. henryi*, *I. cristata*, and *I. lacustris*** - article and photos; blurb on **humus**; **Tips:** Susan Schaefer suggests to **wait a week to fertilize during rainy weeks** and **Crafton Hills Iris Farm in California is open for sales** via their [website](#); What to do in the Iris Garden this Month; **History: *Iris variegata* and *I. pallida* – foundational species of the modern tall bearded iris**; Limerick; Quotes: “Today is the first of February, snowy, brilliant, but dripping with the sound of spring ...” by Dallas Lore Sharp and “Surely as cometh the Winter, I know there are Spring violets under the snow.” by R. H. Newell

March 2023 – Photo: ‘Lemon Pledge,’ February Meeting Minutes and photos; ***Iris ensata* (Japanese iris)** notes and photos from Chad Harris’ presentation; **Warm-season annuals for the Tucson garden**; blurb on **pollination process and ‘bee-pods’**; **Tips: use Super Glue to heal cracked thumbs** by Kevin and [Schultz Bloom Plus \(10-54-10\)](#) by Sue; What to do in the Iris Garden this Month; **History: gardens moved beyond the realm of royalty and monasteries and into the mainstream, exotic plants transported in Wardian cases, and an International Conference on Irises in Paris in June 1922**; Limerick; Quotes: “Now say to yourself five times, and believe it...‘This is March. The main thing to do in March is to don’t...’” by Alfred Carl Hottes and “The older I grow, the more do I love spring and spring flowers.” by Emily Dickinson

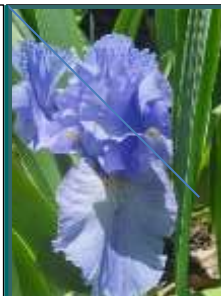
April 2023 – Photo: ‘Eastertime,’ March Meeting Minutes and photos; Structure of an **Iris Show** – from our Show Schedule; More about the Show; **Artistic Design Scoring** from the AIS Judges Handbook; **Hover Flies or Syrphid Flies** article and photos; **Ready, Set, Showtime – preparing irises for the show**; blurb on [Espoma Flower-Tone](#) fertilizer and a special soil mix for irises; **Tips: Check out [fragrantiris.com](#)** by Sue and how to **deal with fuzzy white mold on houseplant soil**; What to do in the Iris Garden this Month; **History: Specific wild Eurasian iris traits become the dream** for enriching the garden irises of the day; Limerick; Quotes: “There is no glory in star or blossom till looked upon by a loving eye...” by William C. Bryant and “It is true, as they say, that the blossoms of spring are all the more precious because they bloom so briefly.” by Murasaki Shikibu

May 2023 – Photo: ‘Bess Cheever,’ **Notes and photos from our Iris Show, ‘Iris Enchantment,’ Some Tips Picked up at the Show**; **Native Bees** article and photos; blurb on **hybridizers selling their unnamed seedlings may account for the huge number of NOIDS in existence**; **Tips: [Purdue Plant Doctor](#) website for help with plants or pests and keep mulch away from crowns of plants** by Sue; What to do in the Iris Garden this Month; **History: problems crossing wild Eurasian irises with garden irises comes down to ploidy** (read about ploidy in our [April 2018](#) newsletter); Limerick; Quotes: “Among the changing months, May stands confest The sweetest...” by James Thomson and “What potent blood hath modest May.” by Ralph W. Emerson

June 2023 – Photo: ‘Coral Dancer,’ May Meeting Minutes and photos; **Notes from the National Weather Service presentation**; **Bumblebees** article and photos; blurb on **use of “bumblebee,” “humblebee,” and “dumbledor,”** **Tips: make two labels per iris plant to safe-guard the name**; What to do in the Iris Garden this Month; **History: Importance of crosses of *Iris cypriana* and *I. pallida* by Michael Foster**; Limerick; Quotes: “June comes, and ours is so green a world that we quite forget the all but leafless days of January...” by Hal Borland and “Mist in May, heat in June, Make the harvest come right soon.” – Proverb



July 2023 – Photo: ‘Babbling Brook,’ Photos of Cathy Pane-Scire’s irises; **Hummingbird** moths article and photos; blurb on **botanical varieties**; **Tips: Work smarter, not harder: elevated sprinkling cans = less lifting of full cans of water, and cobbles under the roof’s drip line = less mud-splash on the walls of the house** by Sue; What to do in the Iris Garden this Month; **History: *Iris kashmiriana*’s contribution to modern TB irises**; Limerick; Quotes: “A rustle of corn-leaves; a tinkle of bells on the hills; ... A butterfly blundering by — And that is July!” ... from “July in the West” by James Newton Matthews and “If the first of July be rainy weather, It will rain, more or less, for four weeks together.” by John Ray



August 2023 – Photo: ‘Making a Splash,’ Photos of irises in the gardens of Joyce Knill and Linda Ammon; **Hummingbirds** article and photos; blurb on **cultivars**; **Tips: Pot all new irises immediately to baby them** by Nancy McDonald of HIPS; What to do in the Iris Garden this Month; **History: *Iris trojana*’s contributions to modern TB irises**; Haiku; Quotes: “And from the hot field’s farthest edge The cricket’s soft refrain With mellow accent tells the tale That August’s here again.” by Helen Maria Winslow and “Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass on a summer day listening to the murmur of water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is hardly a waste of time.” by John Lubbock



September 2023 – Photo: Bb ‘Sierra Sunrise,’ August Auction and Meeting Minutes and photos; **Hummingbirds and Hummingbird Gardening** article and photos; **Preparing Rhizomes for the Sale** article; 6th Annual Photo Contest details; blurb on **cultivars**; **Tips: hummingbird nectar mix**; What to do in the Iris Garden this Month; **History: ‘Trosuperba,’ ‘Dominion,’ and ‘Amas’/‘Macrantha,’** Limerick; Quotes: "But now in September the garden has cooled, and with it my possessiveness. The sun warms my back instead of beating on my head ... The harvest has dwindled, and I have grown apart from the intense midsummer relationship that brought it on." by Robert Finch and “We come from the earth, we return to the earth, and in between we garden.” by Alfred Austin



October 2023 – Photo: AB ‘Shaman’s Magic,’ Report on the Sale with photos; **Bats as Pollinators** article and photos; blurb on **first hummingbird feeder**; **Tips: Being less attractive to mosquitos**; What to do in the Iris Garden this Month; **History: *I. mesopotamica*’s contributions to modern TB irises**; Limerick; Quotes: “O suns and skies and clouds of June, And flowers of June together, Ye cannot rival for one hour October’s bright blue weather...” by Helen Hunt Jackson and "After the keen still days of September, the October sun filled the world with mellow warmth." by Elizabeth George Speare



November 2023 – Photo: ‘Copper Frills,’ October Meeting Minutes and photos; Notes and photos from our **Dig at TBG**; **Butterflies and Butterfly Gardening** article and photos; **Tips on Photographing Butterflies**; **Winning Photos from our Photo Contest**: Single flower or stem, Macro view, and Miscellaneous and Garden categories; blurb on **what Adam Ferrell-Wortman, TBG horticulturalist, added to the soil in the new iris beds before the Dig**; **Tips: apply ice cube to ease contact dermatitis from plants** by Sue and ideas for **fertilizing spuria** irises this month by J. Hedgecock; What to do in the Iris Garden this Month - **ideas for metal plant markers and labels, move potted irises into the sun for the cool season, and ideas for fertilizers**; **History: *Iris aphylla*’s contributions to modern TB irises**; Limerick; Quotes: “Thanks for time to be together, turkey, talk, and tangy weather...” from “All in a Word” by Aileen Fisher and “My road leads me, lures me west, east, south and north; most roads lead men homewards, my road leads me forth.” “Roadways” by John Masefield



December 2023 – Photo: ‘War Chief,’ Tips from Kevin on **plant labels and markers**; November Meeting Minutes and photos from the Potluck; **Chocolate Midge** article and photos, blurb on **humic acid loosening clay soils**, **Tips: for planting irises – fill pot with 1/4 compost, 1/3 pumice, rest Kellogg’s Patio Plus Premium Outdoor Potting Mix (if using Miracle-Gro or other potting mix, up the compost amount to 1/3). Mix well. Add 1 T 10-10-10 or similar. Soak bottoms of rhizomes in water overnight to jump start the roots, and then plant** by Joyce; What to do in the Iris Garden this Month; **History: William Mohr**, winner of the first Dykes Medal; Limerick, Quotes: “All that is gold does not glitter...deep roots are not reached by the frost.” by J R R Tolkien and “Only in reflection, it seems, do we get to make sense of what has been, to then play a part in shaping what might be.” by Joanna Gaines



Treasurer's Report for December - submitted by Jim Wilcoxon

Beginning checkbook balance (1 Dec 2023) 11,430.76

DEC INCOME	THIS MO.	YEAR TO DATE
Dues-----	0.00-----	816.00
Plant Sales-----	0.00-----	6284.86
Show (plant sales)-----	0.00-----	425.16
Auction-----	0.00-----	0.00
Donation-----	0.00-----	70.00
Other-----	0.00-----	0.00
TOTAL-----	0.00-----	7596.02

DEC EXPENSES	THIS MO.	YEAR TO DATE
Program-----	0.00-----	0.00
Plant (etc) purchases-----	120.00-----	1679.73
Show--(misc)-----	0.00-----	362.90
Food, (etc)-----	0.00-----	398.68
Admin-----	0.00-----	655.90
Sale supplies-----	0.00-----	224.42
TOTAL-----	120.00-----	3321.63

Ending checkbook balance (31 Dec 2023) 11,310.76

Petty Cash-----+8.70

Net Worth-----11,319.46

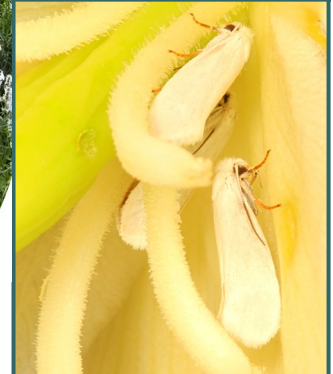
1 JAN 2023 checkbook balance 7023.95

31 Dec 2023 11,319.46

YTD CHANGE +4295.51



Above: an example of a Moon Garden (from Flowerchick.com). Experiment to find which types of white flowers grow best in your own garden.



Pollinator of the Month, Part IX: Moths

There are over 160,000 species of moths, and there's even a National Moth Week in mid-July. Many of these animals are pests and cause extensive damage to forests, crops, foodstuffs, and wool and silk clothes, such as spongy moths (formerly known as gypsy moths), corn borers and tomato hornworms, pantry moths, and clothes moths, respectively. As you can tell by some of those names, it is the typically moth caterpillars that cause the damage. However, some moths are important pollinators. They have been found to be more efficient pollinators than bees in a study in England.

A main difference between butterflies and moths is the feathery antennae of the latter. (See first photo). Although moths developed during the Carboniferous, their characteristic proboscis only developed during the Cretaceous alongside development of the angiosperms, or flowering plants.

Many types of moths are nocturnal, while others are *diurnal*, or active during the day. We've already examined some diurnal types, the sphinx or hummingbird moths, in the [July 2023 newsletter](#). Another is *Gnophaela discrete*, a bold-looking moth that does not seem to have a common name, Dave and I first encountered them in 2019, high up on Mount Humphreys in Flagstaff, feeding on coneflowers. Still other moths are *crepuscular*, or active during twilight.

Of special interest to we desert-dwellers is the yucca moth, although as I write this, I remember that my mom has yuccas in her yard in Pennsylvania which were there when she and my dad bought their house in 1960. Yuccas have even spread into Canada, and the yucca moths have followed them. There are two genera of yucca moths doing all the work: *Tegeticula* and *Parategeticula*. These moths emerge from their cocoons when yuccas begin to bloom and they mate on the flowers. The female does not have a proboscis like most moths and butterflies, but has tentacle-like appendages near her mouth which she uses to gather pollen from the yucca flower's anthers. She rolls the pollen grains into a ball, which she carries tucked under her chin (if moths had a chin). After mating, she seeks out a blossom on another yucca plant, and uses her antennae to smell if another female has laid eggs in the ovary of this bloom. If not, she deposits some eggs (but not so many as to cause the flower to abort) there with her ovipositor and then puts the ball of pollen on the stigma. Thus being fertilized, the flower produces a fruit and seeds, which serve as food for the larvae of the yucca moth. These become fully grown in a few weeks, and drop off to form cocoons near the base of the plant, ready to start the circle of life all over again. A similar relationship exists between the senita moth, *Upiga virescens*, and the senita cactus.

Attract pollinating moths to your garden by growing their food plants such as yuccas and senita cacti. Another way is to create a Moon Garden of fragrant white flowers and plants with silvery foliage. Some options are Datura (whose flowers open in late afternoon), Moonflower (*Ipomoea alba*, the tropical white morning glory), sweet alyssum, white-flowering lilies and roses such as Casa Blanca lily and Iceberg rose, white clematis, *Nicotiana* (flowering tobacco), PowPow White Coneflower, allium, and night-blooming jasmine. Add in some foliage plants such as lamb's ears, artemisia, and Diamond Frost euphorbia. Moths would not be the only creatures to love such a spot! - SC

Sources: [Moth Pollination \(usda.gov\)](#); [Yucca Moths \(usda.gov\)](#); [Year of the Sphingidae – Diurnal Moths – National Moth Week](#); Wikipedia articles on [Moths](#), [Yucca Moths](#), [Senita Cactus](#), and [Senita Cactus Moths](#); [Moths are more efficient pollinators than bees, shows new research \(phys.org\)](#); [How To Design A Moon Garden - \(flowerchick.com\)](#)



From top: *Gnophaela discrete* (by Sue Clark), yucca moths collecting pollen (by B. Gallagher), senita moth, senita cactus (*Lophocereas schottii* or *Pachocereas schottii*) (both images from Wikipedia), and totem pole form of senita cactus (from eBay)



From top left: Susan Schaefer, one of our top growers, in her garden in 2022 (photos by Joyce Knill). Longtime TBG volunteer and TAIS member Sam Wymer and the 2150 Club doing a clean up of the Garden District in May 2023 (photo from TBG e-newsletter). Three “mother” rhizomes that would typically be broken off and tossed are sending up two and three increases each in my pots (Lady Friend, Mesmerizer, and Ozark Rebounder). NOID blooming in Dec. in music-themed section of the TBG iris bed by butterfly pavilion (photo by Cindy Long)



TAIS OFFICERS, ETC. FOR 2024

Kevin Kartchner - President

Cindy Long - 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 January:

Maintenance: Examine bases of irises for aphids. Carefully squash these insect pests by hand or spray with water, insecticidal soap, or diluted dish soap. Water when indicated by moisture meter inserted 2" deep.

Organic Care: Continue applying fish emulsion every two weeks and humic acid as desired. Apply feather meal monthly.

Non-organic Care: Fertilize irises weekly with 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) mixed according to directions on package. - SC



Tip Exchange

If you have several plants of one variety of iris, consider doing some experiments in the coming year. Type of mulch: bark, wood chips, pea gravel, pecan shells? (Just no dyed mulch, since it contains toxins). Depth of mulch: none, 1", or 2"? Rhizomes rotting in pots: try using a different soil mix, adding 1/3 of pot's volume of pumice, adding compost? Try adding Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*), which has been shown to prevent rot. See this [article](#) that Kevin found on it. - SC

Iris Limerick:

There once was a girl named Pearl,
Who lived her life in a whirl.
She grew lots of flowers
And spent countless hours
In a garden she called "Pearl Awhirl."
- Sue Clark

Did You Know?

Historic irises are 30+ years old. If you are looking for a certain historic iris, there is a page called The Locator in each issue of ROOTS, the Journal of the Historic Iris Preservation Society. Submit the name of the desired variety (or the hybridizer if you are looking for any irises bred by a certain person) to coeditors@historicism.org with a description, your name and email address. Submit a list of your historic irises to data-bank@historicism.org and a list of your irises with purple-based foliage to same.- SC



'Fair Elaine'

Source: AIS Iris Wiki

"Time spent tending to your garden is never time wasted." – Katrina Mayer



A Little Bit of Botany and Iris History

Sydney Mitchell was born in Canada in 1878. While a student at McGill University there, one of the university's gardeners gave him his first irises, which he grew in his brother's backyard. Both Sydney and his wife became enamored with irises and moved to California to grow more of them. Mitchell worked as a librarian at UC Berkley, and eventually created and headed their graduate program in Librarianship.

Always interested in horticulture, Mitchell wrote four books on the topic: Gardening in California, From a Sunset Garden, Your California Garden and Mine, and Iris for Every Garden. He was also a renowned speaker. Mitchell founded the American Fuchsia Society and was involved in the creation of the American Iris Society. He wrote many articles for the AIS Journal, as well as served on various committees. He contributed a chapter called "Irises on the Pacific Coast" to the AIS book entitled The Iris - An Ideal Hardy Perennial. Pacific Coast Irises were a particular favorite of Mitchell, who featured them in his gardens. In fact, he was a proponent of using native plants in gardens, not just native irises.

The names of Sydney Mitchell and William Mohr are closely entwined in the iris world, as Mitchell mentored Mohr and then inherited the latter's iris collection when Mohr died in 1923. He introduced Mohr's best seedlings and furthered the lines. Mitchell operated an iris nursery in the Berkley Hills, which he sold when he became focused on hybridizing the flowers. He accidentally created the first-known space-age iris, 'Advance Guard,' which had "a curious extension on its beard." He passed this seedling along to his friend Lloyd Austin, since he himself had other hybridizing goals. Austin, however, was smitten and his name became synonymous with space-age irises.

Sydney Mitchell was honored with the AIS Hybridizer Award in 1941 and with the British Iris Society's Foster Memorial Plaque in 1943. Some of his best-known irises include 'Naranja' (1935), 'Fair Elaine' (1938), and 'San Francisco' (1927). He introduced the latter on behalf of William Mohr and it won the first Dykes Medal. - SC

Sources: [World of Irises: Sydney B. Mitchell: A Renowned California Hybridizer](#) (theamericaniressociety.blogspot.com), AIS Wiki entries on [Sydney Mitchell](#) and on [The Iris: an ideal hardy perennial](#)