

May 2026

TAIS Newsletter

Tucson Area Iris Society - established 1965

Our 61th year

An Affiliate of the American Iris Society



**'Great Gatsby
(McWhirter, 1993)**

Marcusen Sculpture Gardens,
Prescott, Arizona

Photo by Sue Clark, 2025

President's Message

We put on another impressive TAIS iris show for the public. There were many flowers, arrangements, and roses too! I always find it interesting to see what forms and colors people migrate to. A little of everything. We also sold out of most of our potted plants.

I have heard from many TAIS members and friends that they grew great leaves but poor to no bloom. Pat has a theory about this related to our way above average warm winter - see p. 7-8.

On the positive side, the CPC (Climate Prediction Center) is forecasting a wetter than average summer (https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/predictions/long_range/seasonal.php?lead=3) and winter with average temperatures (https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/predictions/long_range/seasonal.php?lead=8). Here's to a better future.

- Kevin Kartchner

"If it's drama that you sigh for. plant a garden and you'll get it. You will know the thrill of battle fighting foes that will beset it. If you long for entertainment and for pageantry most glowing. plant a garden and this summer spend your time with green things growing." 🌿 🌿 🌿

- Edward A. Guest. Plant a Garden

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Upcoming Events

Next Meeting: May 9, 1 PM, Miller-Golf Links Library, 9640 E Golf Links Road. Pat Olsen will speak on Fragrant Iris and how to enjoy their scent even beyond bloom season

June & July: No meetings these months. Newsletter will continue

August 8: 1 PM, Tucson Botanical Gardens. TAIS Rhizome Auction, one of our few members-only events & one of our fundraisers

September 19: TAIS Rhizome Sale, 9-noon, Harlow's Gardens

October 17: Region 15 Trek hosted by TAIS, 9 AM - 4 PM, Tohono Chul

Birthday Wishes to:

**Kevin Kartchner Wendy O'Rourke
Cheryl Modaff Margie Valenzuela**

Our sympathy to Diane Pavlovich on the passing of her sister, Sally Vega on the loss of her father, and Cathy Pane-Scire upon the loss of her mother



Source: Maria Sibylla Merian, late 1600s



Report from the Iris Show



18 April 2026 - For anyone who loves looking at beautiful blossoms, this was the day! The basement of Trinity Presbyterian Church was filled with them for the annual combined show of the Iris and Rose Societies. Single iris stems were featured on one long table, mostly tall beardeds, with some beardless types including Spurias, Louisianas, and Japanese. Kevin, Dan, Terry, Diane, and Pat all exhibited iris. Both Kevin and Dan took away blue ribbons, with Kevin's 'In the Loop' named as Best in Show. Another long table was full of artistic arrangements, this year by Terry, Diane, Dave, and me. Both Terry and I won blue ribbons and my crescent-shaped arrangement won Best Design of Show. I also received a Sweepstakes award for earning a ribbon in each of the five categories. (Watch for photos of Artistic Arrangements in the July

newsletter).

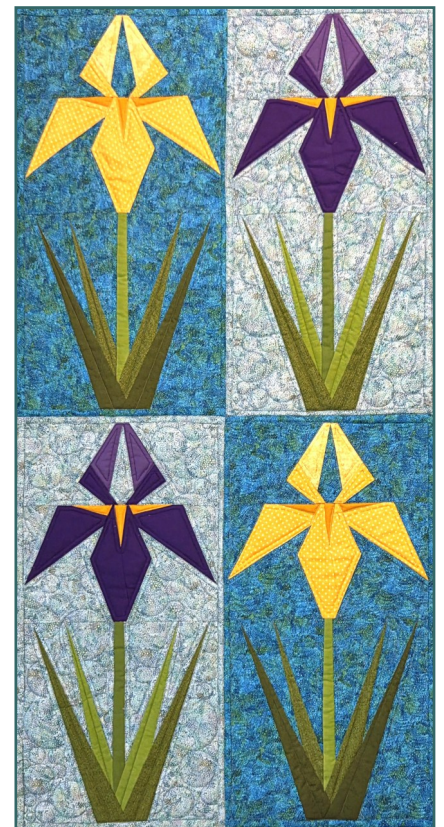
The remainder of the room was filled with roses, photos of roses, and arrangements of roses, as well as a plant sale table, which nearly sold out during the afternoon.

Thank you to everyone involved. Terry as chairman of both shows; the set-up committee of Terry, Kevin, Jody and John; Bonnie and Joyce as clerks; Sam as our long-standing and valued cashier; everyone who grew potted irises for today's sale; Linda for organizing food with donations and help from Jody and John, Joyce, Bonnie, Terry, Brian and Leigh, as well as Chris Murphy from the Rose Society. And whomever brought the ginger cookies! Also, thank you to the clean-up crew of Sally, Pat, Kevin, Brian and Leigh, Terry, Diane and Lou, Dave and me,

and I apologize to those that I forgot to mention here. Special thanks to TAIS member Elaine Lim for coming to see the show, to Pete, custodian of the church, and to our judges: Sharon, Dale, Gerry, and Cheryl.

All in all, another excellent show and a chance to see many fabulous flowers!

- Sue Clark, secretary



Quilts and quilted wall hangings for the silent auction at our upcoming Trek: two featuring irises and one for Fall

**Best Specimen
of 2026 Show =
'In the Loop'**



We're on the web:

Tucsoniris.org

TAIS Iris Show - photos by Dave Smith & three by Sue



TAIS Iris Show - photos by Dave Smith & one by Sue



Above: about 80 stalks of irises graced the table

Center right: the winner's circle of blue-ribbon irises from which the judges selected the best stalk



Above: top three TBs - 'Sharp Dressed Man,' 'Sorano,' and 'In the Loop,' the top spuria - 'Line Dancing,' and the top Louisiana - 'Nora Jane' (all Kevin's)

Far right: 'In the Loop' (Ghio, 2013), Best Specimen of Show (formerly known as Queen of Show), grown by Kevin



Treasurer's Report for April

- submitted by Jim Wilcoxon

BEGINNING BALANCE	14,791.73
Income	
Dues	30.00
Charge Sales during Show	261.63
Cash Sales during Show	320.00
Total income	<u>611.63</u>
Expenses (Show)	
Church	150.00
Peter	90.00
Food	100.00
Table décor	43.77
Total expenses	<u>383.47</u>
ENDING BALANCE	15,019.89



Iris Pests, Part IIB: Mealybugs - Removal Tactics

by Joyce Knill

In last month's newsletter Sue Clark provided a well-researched article on mealybugs. She asked me to follow up on that article and relate eradication experiences in my garden. My efforts to remove them from my iris has not been met with any degree of success, but generally, I am not a quitter, so I have tried many different techniques and chemicals. Getting past the tears while standing amongst my iris, I am now trying to approach this experience with a little humor.

Just to remind you, mealybugs have 2 to 6 generations a year. The males may be blown in the wind and females have legs, and together they are prolific! The first sign of visitors is a brownish line from the tip of the iris leaf, gradually working down the side. (See photo). They can overwinter in Tucson soil, but if we were up in Flagstaff, we may never see a mealybug. (Too cold.) And why are we concerned about mealybugs? Because as they slurp and party down the leaf to the rhizome, they arrive at a dead end. As they exit the top 1/16" of the rhizome, they have now left a wound open for rot - usually deadly in the heat of the summer. In addition, the resulting leaf cannot photosynthesize.

In late September 2023, some late-birthers were attacking my remaining healthy iris leaves, left behind by their ancestors. These mealybugs have happily given me generations of mealys in '24 and '25. After a mild 2025 winter, I found them happily slurping up my iris sap in early February 2026. They thrive in warm weather and are attracted to irrigated or moist soil with a high Nitrogen level as this is needed for egg production. Knowing this, I had cut back on watering to the point my leaves feel soft, (continued on p. 6)



From top: iris leaf showing damage caused by mealybugs that traveled downward through it, and mealybugs within the fold of an iris leaf and at base. Dime for scale. (Photos by Joyce)

Mealybug Eradication, continued

rather than firm. Ms. Mealy isn't too picky about her leaves, so she will attack soft or firm leaves, whatever strikes her fancy that day.

You may ask how did they arrive in my garden? To the best of my knowledge, I received them about 3 years ago after a plant sale. Even though I soak my iris in the water/bleach solution, mealybugs are hidden so deep within the crevice of the iris leaf, they were undetected and unaffected by my soaking. When I first saw the white fluff, I thought it was from a neighboring cottonwood tree. Wrong! My first line of attack was to firmly smooth the leaf between my fingers, from the rhizome up to the tip. Upon opening the leaf, it appeared I had squished the little fellas pretty well. Not so. Within days, I noticed some leaves starting to yellow and streak from the tip toward the base. Opening the leaf, there they were! Slurping away, partying, and having sex in my garden!! This couldn't be, so I pulled out the Neem oil and sprayed them every 5-7 days. Having done a little research, I knew I needed to soak the entire leaf to the base. However, after 6 weeks of this, I threw in the towel. After a trip to my local Ace Hardware, I came home with a Triple Action product, made by Fertilome. The label said it controlled mealybugs, so for the rest of the season I sprayed every 10 days as directed. Apparently Fertilome hasn't met a Tucson mealybug, because they were hardly deterred. Late that summer I found them partying in my Canna leaves, which were near the iris. This called for more research and another trip to Ace Hardware, looking for a chemical with Imidacloprid in it. I found Bonide Annual Insect Control Liquid Concentrate for use on tree and shrub. I chickened out, afraid to use it on my iris. (I may change my mind, though). I found Bonide Systemic Insect Control in liquid form, which I sprayed all summer of 2025, with less than acceptable results. I did notice that 15 minutes after spraying, the little white females were vacating the leaf folds. (At this point they look like a grain of sea salt.) At the 2025 AIS Convention in Billings, I asked a hybridizer for his suggestion for mealybug control. As they use a commercial product not available to the public, he felt the use of a systemic was necessary. In the fall, I had a botanist in my backyard looking

at my trees, and I asked him about mealybugs. He looked over my collection of additives and sprays, and suggested the same [Bonide Systemic Insect Control, but in a granular form](#), to be applied in January, which I did. Since this is only April, I can report I haven't seen new infestations of my friends in the iris, the Cannas, or my Sonoran lilies. But the verdict is still out. Conferring with Pat Olsen, she suggested spraying a solution of 70% isopropyl alcohol and water. My favorite solution was found on line. It was an iris lover who decided to *treat iris as an annual*.

Enjoy the Spring bloom, let the mealybugs party, remove the iris, and order new rhizomes for the next year. It is a thought.
- JK



Above: latest attempt at eradication - Bonide Systemic Insect Control granules - mealybugs are listed first! (photo from Amazon.com)

The Language of Iris #4 by Pat Olsen

Listening to Winter in our Spring Blooms

Iris enter a phase of dormancy during early fall, but they aren't simply waiting for spring to arrive. Starting in October, these flowers actively decide how tall their bloom stalks will grow, how many buds they'll produce, the timing of their blossoming, and the overall quality of each flower. This period is surprisingly busy for the irises. In Tucson, the most critical time is November through January.

Tall Bearded Irises need to accumulate chill hours for strong spring blooms. Below is a chart of what to expect based on accumulated chill hours:

- < 200 hours: Expect irregular bloom
- 200-300 hours: Bloom likely, but comprised
- 300-450 hours: Good Performance
- 450+ hours : Excellent Performance

Other classes of irises have different requirements. MDBs like more consistent chill for best performance, Louisiana and Siberian iris need even more chill and moisture, and Species/Arilbreds have a wide range of chill hour needs.

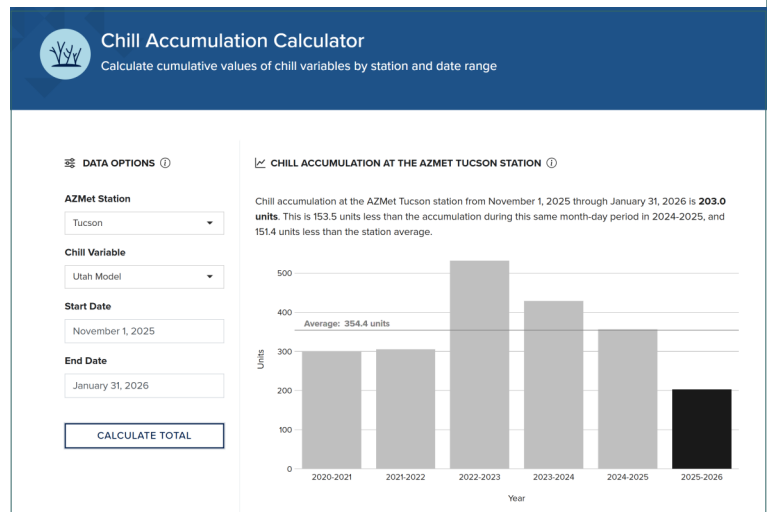
Consistency is perhaps the most important factor for bloom. A low number of consistent chill hours could easily out-perform a large quantity of interrupted chill. The 2025 bloom season was medium for chill hours providing beautiful bloom. 2026 had very low chill hours providing the irregular to no bloom we experienced.

What are Chill Hours?

Chill hours are the total number of hours between 32°F and 45°F (0°C–7°C) that a plant requires during winter in order to break dormancy and bloom in spring. The Utah Method is an advanced model that recognizes that not all hours of cold are equal and that warm spells can negate previous cooling. If you wish to perform the calculation on your own, the chart at the top of the next column will help you determine chill hours:

For each hour at: Temperature	# of hours
<=34°F	0.0 chill hours
35° - 36° F	0.5 chill hours
37° - 48°F	1.0 chill hours
49° - 54°F	0.5 chill hours
55° - 60°F	0.0 chill hours
61° -65°F	0.5- chill hours
> 65° F	1.0- chill hours

We are fortunate that the ['Arizona Meteorological Network \(2026\) Arizona Meteorological Network \(AZMet\) Data](#) performs this calculation for us. The typical period for Tucson to accumulate chill is November thru January. The chart below shows a six year trend.



What does all this mean for next year?

Fortunately, this disruption is temporary, not permanent. Irises are hardy. If we return to a more normal cooling followed by gradual warming, most irises will return to normal height, bloom form, and timing. In preparation for next year (after this disastrous season), allow your iris fans to grow. The fans are providing energy for next year. In the upcoming hot summer season, water with restraint. At temperatures over 100°, water and heat will steam the rhizomes promoting rot.

(Continued at bottom of next page...)

New Iris Fan Kindled by Pat Olsen

Sometimes the best things in the garden begin with a simple, "Let's stop and see what's here". Last September, during the TAIS rhizome sale at Harlow Gardens, Clark not only picked out his first irises but also enthusiastically participated in the potting demonstration. That moment planted more than rhizomes; it planted the seed of a passion for irises. Clark diligently cared for his irises. On April 7, 2026, he burst with pride as his first iris bloomed. Two weeks later, on April 22nd, Clark boasts a seventh bloom: "This one is purple".

The American Iris Society offers a youth membership for individuals under 19. Youth members have the same benefits as adult memberships plus contests and awards. The contests include art projects, essays, photography and a lot of fun. Visit the [Youth Membership](#) to learn more. - Pat Olsen

Trek Update by Pat Olsen

The Phoenix Trek was highly informative for our members. While bloom was minimal, it was a successful event for networking and garden visits. Now, it is our turn to host Region 15 on October 17 at Tohono Chul. Registration packets were distributed at the Spring Trek, and additional flyers have been provided to society presidents.

Our website has been updated, with the Trek flyer now serving as the homepage. Registration details and the Tucson Visitor Guide are available at the bottom of the page, while the original homepage has been moved to the "About" link. We will revert to our original layout after the event.

Trek committee members will receive a separate email regarding meeting dates and times. We have five months to finalize our plans, with meetings organized by activity. Our upcoming focus areas include:
May: Registration and First Impressions
June: Goody Bags and Raffle Prizes
July: Volunteer Coordination
August: Lunch
September: Final Review

Volunteer positions include: Check-in, Floaters, Speaker Liaison, Timekeepers, Raffle setup, Raffle Sales, Raffle Winner Announcements, Photographer, Guest Runners, Meal and Water logistics, and AV support. If you wish to volunteer for a specific duty, please email:

taistrekcommittee@gmail.com or speak directly with Pat. With everyone's support, we will successfully host the trek.

The Language of Iris, continued from p. 7

If you feel you must water, a light watering during early daylight hours. In general, I do not water from mid-June through August. Be sure to have adequate drainage for your rhizomes, especially through monsoon season. And Yes, divide your rhizomes as normal in early fall. Overcrowded clumps or clumps which have grown in circles still need to be divided.

While we are concerned about the gradual warming of our Tucson climate, remember a cooling period with temperatures between 34°F – 54°F will provide for a beautiful bloom season.



Note: Photos used with parental permission

Left: Pat and Clark at the TAIS potting demonstration during our rhizome sale at Harlow Gardens in September 2025

Right: Clark's first bloom, April 2026

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 & Brian Moon - Programs & Places

Diane Pavlovich - Publicity

Cindy Long & Linda Briggs - Hospitality

Bonnie Else & Susan Schaefer - Door Prizes

Linda Briggs & Cindy Long - Membership

Dave Smith - Photographer

Sue Clark - Newsletter

What to do in the Iris Garden during May:

Maintenance: Remove spent stems near base using scissors. Monitor soil with moisture meter and water irises when it reads close to dry. Check for aphids and other pests. Remove pests, weeds, and debris. Update or create a map of your iris beds and containers in case labels fade or disappear. Replace faded labels.

Organic care: Apply Spring dose of green sand (1 T) and bone meal (1 T) (the latter is **NOT** for Japanese irises!). Add fish emulsion every other week. Mix as on package. Humic acid improves soil texture. Apply anytime.

Non-organic care: Feed with a send-off dose of SuperBloom or equivalent, as rhizomes set buds by six weeks post-bloom. - SC



Tip Exchange

When gardening in containers, bigger is better. Small containers dry out quickly. Large ones have the additional benefit of insulating roots more effectively. Modern lightweight materials such as fiberglass, foam composites, and plastic facilitate movement of containers. Potting mix is a much better choice than regular soil, as its lightness allows more oxygen and nutrients to reach the roots. If a plant dries out too quickly in a clay pot, try placing a slightly-smaller plastic pot inside of it to retain more moisture. - SC
Source: [Old Farmer's Almanac article](#)

Iris Limerick


There once was an iris show,
Full of people with faces aglow.
It had flowers galore,
And even a store
With roses and irises to go.
- Sue Clark



SDB 'Soft Air'

Did You Know?

Sometimes, lightning shoots *upwards* from thunderstorms. These flashes are known as Transient Luminous Events, or TLEs. *Sprites* are red-orange flashes above thunderstorms. They are most often seen in the Midwest. Very bright Sprites may be followed by *Trolls*, red spots near cloud tops. *Blue Jets* are dim blue bursts above storms, and are only visible from planes. Brief, disk-shaped lights in the Mesosphere, the atmospheric layer above the Stratosphere, are known as *Elves*. And *Gnomes* are very brief white flashes above a storm. Source: [Old Farmers Almanac article](#)

"Close your eyes and do not peek and I'll rub Spring across your cheek. Smooth as satin, soft and sleek. Close your eyes and do not peek." – Aileen Fisher, "Pussy Willow" 

A Little Bit of Botany and Iris History

Last month, we learned about Bee Warburton and how she created some median irises for her rock garden. Orville Fay, a master of breeding tall bearded irises, told Bee that he "wished her enormous talents weren't wasted on the little ones." Undaunted, Bee kept working on the little ones, sometimes spending decades on a single goal. For instance, she loved the color of one of her plicata seedlings - a deep rosy violet wash over a translucent milk-paint base. She named this seedling "Fan 40," since it had 40 chromosomes and she said that it was "fancy in the altogether." The trouble was that the flower's form was terrible. Bee worked for two decades towards placing this color on a flower with excellent form, keeping detailed notes on all of her crosses. The result was a new type of iris called *luminata*, because it appears to be illuminated from within. Luminatas were extremely popular during the 1990's. Bee grumbled, though, because she had still not managed to get the exact color of Fan 40 onto one of these.

One of Bee's important irises is SDB 'Soft Air' (1973), which looks like a blend of lemons and cream. (Photo above). This and other Warburton irises were used extensively by Marky Smith in creating her SDB and IB plicata-variant lines.

Besides earning many awards for her irises, Bee was a writer and editor extraordinaire. Two of her books are still considered important references: most significantly [The World of Irises](#), 1978, which she edited with Melba Hamblen, and [The Eupogon Iris Species in Cultivation](#), 1970, which details information on all types of bearded irises. Bee served for many years as editor of *The Medianite*, the journal of the Median Iris Society, and was influential in the translation of the Romanian and French portions of Julius Prodan's work, [Bearded Iris Species of Romania](#).

As good with people as she was with irises and words, Bee had a special knack for sensing how new members of her groups could best contribute to the organization. Thank you, Bee! - SC

Source: "Bee Warburton" by Lynn Markham in *AIS 100 Years Bold*, Supplement 2 of 4 to *IRISES: the Bulletin of AIS*, 2020 - article abridged from The Medianite 50th Anniversary History Edition, Spring 2007; AIS Wiki for photo and link