



Aurora

Newsletter of the Can-West Iris Society

Autumn, 2019

Volume 13, Issue 3

Update From the Organizing Committee

As we approach the beginning of a new decade, we are all anticipating spring and the 2020 bloom season. Here's hoping for a more 'normal' seasonal progression so that we can all enjoy the irises!

This edition is jam packed and includes the Rebloom Report (p. 2), Three Myths (p. 4), AIS 2019 Awards (p. 11), AIS 2019 National Convention Report (p. 13), and the 2020 AIS Convention Notice. This last is going to fill up fast since it is the 100th anniversary of the organization. If you are considering attending, please register early to avoid disappointment.

Let's start this issue with a couple of administrative items.

1. The library. It has not been used for several years and was chronically under utilized. And so, the decision has been made to discontinue its operation. As far as possible, the books will be returned to the members who have donated them to us over the years. We thank our previous member Librarians, Len Giesbrecht and Mary Kurtz for serving.
2. The website. After more than 10 years with our service provider, Serif.com, they have discontinued their web hosting service. The website, therefore, has been recently moved to a new provider which is HostPresto! Our new domain name is Can-Westis.com. Please update your bookmarks. Nothing has changed yet as the new interface requires a bit of a learning curve. Hopefully it will be updated soon.
3. Our future. The CWIS has been around for just over 15 years. Over the next few months, we will be developing a member survey to help us chart our future course. Once completed, it will be sent to all members for their input. So start thinking about who we are, who you want us to be and what you want us to do. The results of the survey will serve as our blueprint going forward and the more members who respond the better.

4. Membership. If your membership expired in 2019, this will be your last newsletter. If you are unsure whether your membership is up to date, please contact BJ to check and avoid missing out on the Spring 2020 issue.

5. Annual show. The 2020 show has been booked for Sunday, June 14th at Bourkevale Community Centre, 100 Ferry Road in Winnipeg. Mark your calendars. More information will be coming in the Winter/Spring issue due out in March or April next year.

So sit back and enjoy your newsletter. We wish you all the joys of the season and a happy and healthy New Year.

As always, the OC is just an email away. Feel free to contact any of us:

Jennifer Bishop, jennifer@dataways.com Deborah Petrie martyaddict@gmail.com
El Hutchison - Eleanore@mymts.net BJ Jackson - jacksonb@mts.net

Merry Christmas

and a

Happy New Year

Rebloom Report

(Compiled by BJ Jackson)

Rebloom was sparse this year according to reports received from members. Still, a few hardy souls managed to do so and here they are. And no surprise, the first four are Chuck Chapman's creations.

SDB Blueberry Tart (Karin Cassie MB)

SDB Autumn Jester (Donna Reble SK)

SDB Forever Royal (Donna Reble SK)

SDB Forever Blue (Donna Reble SK, Marianne Unruh BC)

IB Fast Forward (Marianne Unruh BC)

IB Many Mahalos (Donna Reble SK)

BB August Wine (Donna Reble SK)

SPEC spuria (white) (Len Giesbrecht MB)

TB Champagne Elegance (Marianne Unruh BC)

TB English Cottage (Marianne Unruh BC)

TB Immortality (Sharon Gray MB, Marianne Unruh BC)

TB Betty Dunn (Marianne Unruh BC)

Selected photos from the iris wiki or the gardens of BJ Jackson follow.



SDB Autumn Jester, Blueberry Tart and Forever Royal



IBs Fast Forward, Many Mahalos; BB Autumn Wine



Tall Bearded English Cottage, Champagne Elegance



SPEC Spuria white (also known as Ted's spuria)

Three Myths About Bearded Irises

by Tom Waters
(used with permission)

Every area of human knowledge has its myths: ideas firmly believed by large numbers of people that are not actually true. The rise of the internet and social media has further complicated the process of separating myth from reality. In earlier times, a curious person might seek out a book or an expert to resolve a question, and stand a fair chance of getting accurate information in return for their effort. But today, when a curious person does an internet search instead, the information they find is just as likely to be wrong as it is to be right.

On the subject of growing bearded irises, I have found three myths that seem to be ubiquitous, and inevitably resurface during any internet discussion of the subject. This article addresses each of these three myths, in the hope that a clear exposition of each will provide a little island of solid information that is often missing from untethered internet exchanges.

Myth #1: Bearded irises will not bloom unless the tops of their rhizomes are exposed to sunlight

Although, as I shall explain in a bit, there are some good reasons for planting irises with the tops of the rhizomes exposed, it is not necessary to do so to ensure bloom. Irises bloom just fine if planted with an inch or more of soil over the rhizome. Nothing magical happens when sunlight strikes the surface of an exposed rhizome. Where did this myth come from? I think it has three sources. The first is a very basic piece of advice: iris rhizomes are not bulbs. Most spring-flowering bulbs (daffodils, tulips, crocuses, etc.) need to be planted fairly deeply (three times their height is a common recommendation). If you plant an iris as deep as a tulip, it may indeed not bloom. In fact it may not survive at all. The second is a general remark about growing conditions irises prefer: they like full sun, or at least half a day of sun, and will not bloom well in too much shade. Finally, there is a bit of traditional advice that irises should be planted "like a duck in the water", with the top half of the rhizome above the soil surface. I think these last two points (a recommendation for planting with exposed rhizomes and the fact that irises bloom best in sunny locations) led people to blend these two ideas together and conclude that it is sunlight striking the tops of the rhizomes that causes irises to bloom. The advice not to plant them deep like tulips or daffodils then reinforces this notion.

Okay, if it is not necessary to expose the rhizomes to direct sunlight to ensure bloom, should I plant them exposed or covered? What is the best planting depth?

The short answer is that it just doesn't matter very much. In most gardens, irises with the rhizomes exposed and irises covered with a half inch or inch of soil will

both do equally well. If you look at an established clump, you will see that the rhizomes themselves sometimes grow down into the soil and sometimes grow up onto the surface. It's all good.

In some locales, particular climate conditions can favor either shallow or deep planting. In a climate that is often rainy and humid, exposed rhizomes are less likely to rot from wet soil. Much of our traditional gardening advice comes from places with such climates: the UK and the eastern seaboard of the US. I believe the advice to plant with rhizomes exposed originated in these areas, and then was simply repeated.

In areas with very cold winters, Irises may benefit from being planted more deeply, making them less susceptible to heaving during freeze-thaw cycles.

In dry, hot regions (such as much of the western US), planting with the rhizomes covered offers some protection against sun-scalding and desiccation from heat and wind. The rhizomes appreciate being below the soil surface, where conditions are a little cooler and moister.

Bottom line: Plant covered or uncovered, according to your preference, experience, and local advice. Irises will bloom just fine either way.



Myth #2: Irises can "revert" to some other color

It seems like everyone has heard a story of a beautiful clump of irises, say nice ruffled pinks, "reverting" to white or purple after a few years. In fact, this does not

happen. Irises do not spontaneously change color. (There is one minor qualification to this statement, which I will address below.)



No, this iris will never "revert to purple"

Where does this myth come from? One source, I think, is that some plants do appear to behave this way, particularly annuals that reseed each year. If one plants a hybrid zinnia or morning glory, for example, the plants that come up from their seed in future years will not look like the original, and in fact may show simple "wild type" colors common in the original species from which the hybrid was developed. A second source of this myth comes from the fact that if different irises are planted together, one of them may multiply faster and eventually take over the planting, making it seem to the casual observer that the irises in the planting have "changed" from the color that was originally common in the planting to the one that eventually took over. But note carefully that this is competition between two different plants, not a single plant changing color.

In almost all cases where people say their irises have "changed color" or "reverted", this is the explanation: there was more than one variety in the planting to begin with, and one that had not bloomed the first year or two grew well and came to dominate the planting in later years.

It is possible for the coloring of an iris to appear somewhat different from one year to the next, because of weather differences or chemical exposure. The blue and violet pigments, in particular, are somewhat sensitive to unusual weather. These changes are changes in the darkness or saturation of color, though, and cannot result in a whole new color or pattern. A pale blue iris may appear to be cool white in one year or sky blue in another year, for example, but will never become yellow or pink. Some herbicides cause deformed blooms with color strongly depleted in some parts of the petals, but the deformity is obvious.

There are a couple other ways an iris of a different color can appear in a planting, even if only one variety was planted to begin with.

The first is hybridization. Just as your morning glories may reseed themselves, so a bearded iris may occasionally form a seed pod and drop its seeds into the soil around the plant. If these seeds sprout, the seedlings may well be a different color than the parent, and when they bloom (perhaps three years after the seeds are first produced), the gardener may be in for a surprise! To prevent this from happening, you can remove the bloom stalks after the flowers fade, so that seed pods do not develop.

Although possible, seedlings appearing in a bearded iris clump this way seldom happens. Most bearded irises do not produce seed on their own. (In my garden, I see maybe two spontaneous seed pods for every thousand blooms.) And bearded iris seeds don't germinate well in many climates without special attention. If seedlings do sprout in an established clump, they will likely be crowded out by the parent. Hybridizers go to a great deal of trouble to get bearded irises to cross-pollinate and to grow the seeds to maturity. The process can and does happen without human intervention, but only seldom. (If you grow beardless irises like Siberians, the appearance of unexpected seedlings is much more likely.)

Finally, an iris may experience a mutation that causes the flower color to change. Such mutations, called "sports", are extremely rare events. Except for a few historic varieties that are prone to such mutations, most irises will never produce a sport. You can grow a thousand different varieties for a decade and never see one. I started growing irises in the 1970s, and have never seen a sport in my garden, or in the gardens of any of my iris-growing friends.

Bottom line: Bearded irises do not spontaneously change color. Each iris is a unique individual, and will retain its original color and pattern forever. If you see a different colored iris in a planting, it must be a different variety that was already there and just had not bloomed, or had not been noticed, before.

Myth #3: Iris foliage should be trimmed back in the fall

It's a ritual that some gardeners swear by: attacking their iris beds in August or September with shears, resulting in a defoliated war zone that looks as though someone had come through the garden with a lawn mower set at 8 inches. Sadly, those irises are now deprived of much of their food source: photosynthesis in green leaves.

Why do people do this? What makes them think that cutting leaves in half is good for their plants? I think there are two sources for this myth. The first is that many perennials do benefit from being cut back at certain times of year, to stimulate new growth, and a new flush of bloom in some cases. But if you are an observant gardener, you will notice that the anatomy of these plants is different from that of irises. These plants have buds along their stems. Removing the tops of the stems encourages the lower buds to grow, resulting in bushier, more vigorous plants. But irises do not grow this way. All the leaves of a fan emerge from a single bud at the tip of the rhizome. When you trim a fan back, you are just chopping leaves in half, not removing any upper buds to stimulate lower buds into new growth.

The second source of this myth is that when irises are dug and divided, the fan is traditionally trimmed back. This is how irises are generally sold: bare-root, with roots and fan trimmed back to about 6 or 8 inches. This trimming is a good idea for an iris that has been dug and divided. Its growth has been interrupted, and it will take some time for new growth to emerge from the rhizome. During that time, a big fan of leaves can weaken the plant by drawing too much water and energy from the rhizome. The leaves lose water by transpiration, which the old damaged roots are not able to replenish. A big fan also makes it easy for the newly planted iris to topple over or become uprooted. But these reasons only apply to plants that have been dug and divided; they are not applicable at all to plants left growing in the soil, undisturbed.

Some have said that trimming back in the fall helps discourage iris borers, which lay their eggs in the leaves at this time of year. The eggs, however, overwinter in dead, dry leaves, not growing green leaves. Removing dead foliage is helpful; cutting green leaves in half is not. The recommended procedure for borer control is to remove all **dead** foliage and burn it in *late winter or early spring*.

Some just think the trimmed fans look tidier. This is understandable. By the end of summer, iris foliage often looks pretty tired and unattractive. Many leaves are drying at the tips, getting a little pale and floppy, and perhaps suffering from damage from insects or other ailments. Ironically, if you trim the leaves back, then the tops where you cut them will just turn brown and dry up, so instead of tall leaves with dry ends, you have short leaves with dry ends. Was it really worth it?

Bottom line: Cutting through the green fans of an iris in the fall does not help the plant, and may weaken it slightly, as you are reducing its capacity for food production through photosynthesis. Irises are rugged, and this slight weakening is something most of them can cope with without suffering much, but why put them through it at all? It does "tidy" your garden, but that only benefits the aesthetic sensibilities of the gardener. It does not help the irises in any way. If you want to tidy up at this time of year, restrict your activity to removing dead foliage and dry leaf ends. Don't cut green leaves!

Text for following last photo:

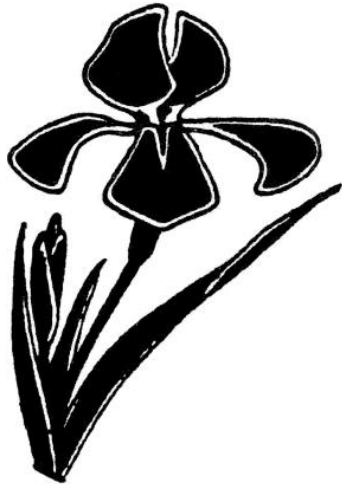
The foliage on the undisturbed clump on the left should not be trimmed. If you want to tidy up, remove just the dead leaves (1 and 2) and the dry end of leaf 3.



Did You Know.....

... the irises in the classes Standard Dwarf Bearded (SDB), Intermediate Bearded (IB), Miniature Tall Bearded (MTB) and Border Bearded (BB) together are called medians?

Median irises provide a wide range of beautiful colors and patterns on hardy, easy-to-grow, smaller garden plants.



American Iris Society
2019 Awards

And the winners are (insert drum roll here):

Dyke's Medal - TB Bottle Rocket (M. Sutton, 2009)



**Knowlton Medal (Border Bearded)
My Cher Of Happiness (P. Black, 2013)**



**Williamson-White Medal (Miniature Tall Bearded irises)
Gesundheit (Charles Bunnell, 2011)**



**Cook-Douglas Medal (Standard Dwarf Bearded)
Raspberry Ice (Keith Keppel)**



A full list of all of the 2019 winners is available to view
and/or download in pdf format from
<http://www.irises.org/about-ais/awards-symposiums/>

Convention Report

The 2019 AIS National Convention

San Ramon, California

(By Sandy Proulx)

Take a woman who has lived in the Canadian Prairies all her life, and transport her to the San Francisco Bay area during the month of April – a time of year where everything is still ugly and brown at home, sometimes even still covered with snow. As a house-bound gardener who is longing to get her hands into the soil, the sudden change in scenery was enough to make me giddy! Glorious summer weather! Colour everywhere you look! And that was only on the taxi ride from the airport to the hotel.

This was the second AIS convention that I attended, prompted by the wonderful experiences when I attended my first, back in 2017 when our local Region 21 was the host. I am also in the final stages of become a full-fledged iris judge, and these conventions offer an excellent opportunity to view hundreds of different new irises and meet many other experienced judges and iris hybridizers in person.

The 2019 convention was hosted by Region 14, and the garden tours encompassed the Santa Cruz coast, the SF Bay, the Sacramento Valley and the Sonoma wine country. I arrived on Tuesday April 23rd and stayed until the end of the convention on Saturday, April 27th. This article touches on some of the highlights of the week.

Many interesting presentations were made by different iris societies, beginning Wednesday the 24th and continuing until Friday the 26th. A couple of those I attended were:

HIPS program presentation given by Mary Hess of Bluebird Haven Iris Garden
<http://bluebirdhavenirisdgarden.com/>

Mary does garden rescues! She is often contacted by gardeners who are not able to care for their irises any more (due to age or illness), or by people who have newly purchased property with irises blooming on it. Many times, the gardens are badly overgrown, and of course no one knows the names of the irises either! So Mary is also an iris detective. Her presentation was fascinating, and my one regret was that I had to return home on Sunday and couldn't spend an extra day going to see her garden.

Dwarf Iris Society presentation given by Lee Walker

This involved a talk about the genetics of dwarf irises, some of which went over my head even though I know that Lee probably “dumbed it down” for those of us who don’t have a background in scientific research. One thing I learned is that a great many registered MDB irises actually have a TB in their genetic background, and this sometimes causes them to attain bloom heights that are in excess of the maximum height requirement (8 inches) to remain in the MDB class. Lee’s work in genetics is aimed at introducing new Miniature Dwarf Bearded irises that do not have this tendency.

Region 14 Iris Show

This year’s host region thoughtfully scheduled an iris show on Wednesday April 24th. For me, the most fascinating part of the show was the ability to wander about outside the hotel on the patio and watch the exhibitors preparing their entries. This was the first time in my life that I ever saw a Pacific Coast iris. I was also very much intrigued by some of the containers used to transport the irises from the garden to the show. These containers were made of PVC pipe, glued together in various formations so as to keep the tall bearded irises standing up straight and not allowing them to touch one another.



Garden Tours

The garden tours are probably the most fun part of the entire convention. Chartered buses take all the attendees to specially prepared gardens, some of them privately owned by AIS members, and some public gardens maintained by local

iris societies. Approximately 3 years in advance, rhizomes are sent to the host region for planting. Many varieties are sent specifically because they have already received an Award of Merit or Honorable Mention, so they are eligible for future awards. Seedling rhizomes are also sent, because the convention is an excellent opportunity for exposure to hundreds of AIS judges who can vote for them. This level of forward planning never ceases to amaze me!

At each and every garden, our hosts offered a vast array of delicious food, much of which was home made. It didn't matter whether it was time for lunch or not! We were also treated to live music during the lunch hour at a couple of the gardens.

Below is a list of this year's tour gardens:

Frannie's Iris Garden – Fran and Russ Shields in Elk Grove

Horton Iris Garden – Mary Ann Horton in Loomis

C&L Vineyard Garden – Rudy Ciuca and Joe Lawrence in Sonoma

One hour of garden judges training was provided at this location. I was thoroughly “schooled” by high school senior Amberlee Pick of Region 14, who brought along her own personalized Garden Iris Assessment form because she felt that the form provided by the convention planners was not detailed enough. She taught us how to assess a clump of irises by looking at the various components, such as the height and number of bloom stalks, the condition of the foliage, the number of buds per stalk, etc.

Cummins Garden – Irene and Jim Cummins in Scotts Valley

Dry Creek Pioneer Regional Park – Union City – Jeff Bennett president of Mt. Diablo Iris Society

When not gardening, Jeff is a park ranger, and somehow he convinced the park to let him plant a “few irises”. We aren't sure whether the park staff really knew exactly what they were agreeing to! In my opinion, this was by far the most spectacular garden venue of all, because all the irises were together in one large area, and all the rows were so pristine. The park put up an 8 foot fence to keep wildlife out, dug and installed an irrigation system, and provided excellent signage. After the convention was over, the garden was opened to the public.

The convention ended with an Awards Dinner on Saturday evening, which was made even more memorable by a power outage which began earlier that afternoon and continued through the evening until it was time for the dessert! The hotel staff

rose to the occasion by cooking the entrees on barbecues. The winners of the Convention Awards were announced after the meal. These are popularity awards, based on the votes given by the conference attendees.

President's Cup – for best named variety by a hybridizer from the host region (in this case Region 14) was won by Rick Tasco for TB “Autumn Explosion”



Franklin Cook Cup – for best named variety by a hybridizer from outside the host region was won by Paul Black for TB “Rise Like a Phoenix”.

Ben R. Hager Cup – for best median iris was also won by Paul Black for IB “Black Comedy”.



Lloyd Zurbrigg-Clarence Maham Seedling Cup – went to Hooker Nichols for seedling #1978.

Gerald Richardson Award - a new award given to a privately-owned tour garden that shows irises to their best advantage in companion plantings. This was won by Irene and Jim Cummins who not only used other companion plants in their iris beds, but also added salvaged and antique farming implements and machinery.



In conclusion, I would like to encourage each and every one of you to attend an AIS convention! It is so much fun. The people you meet are amazing, and you will learn so much!

The American Iris Society A Centennial Celebration!

May 18 - 23, 2020

1920 - 2020



A Special Year

Join us to celebrate 100 years of The American Iris Society. Included will be lots of different venues such as the New York Botanical Garden, and Wave Hill Public Gardens, both in New York. Also, several optional tours focusing on New York City are planned. Check all the details on this website.

International Iris Competition

For the first time in AIS history, an International Iris Competition in honour of the Centennial Celebration will be held during the convention. Irises from several countries were shipped in the summer/fall of 2018 to Presby Memorial Iris Gardens. They have been grow and cared for until a panel of international judges will be charged with reviewing each one of them in the early days of the Convention. The results will be viewed by Convention attendees, and the winners will be presented with their respective awards during the Closing Banquet.

Check this website for registration and program information at
<https://2020irisconvention.org/registration>.

More 2019 AIS Convention Photos



*Top: View of one of the tour gardens.
Left: Seedling under consideration for the Centennial
naming competition.
Above: Part of the Artistic Design section at the show.*



*Top: Attendees wandering a tour garden
Bottom left: TBBetter Than Butter and MTB Endless Treasure*