



# New Zealand Iris Society

Bulletin 214 – June 2021

## 2021 NZIS Photographic Competitions

Please send your entries to the President (- see p. 4 for contact details).

### Paul Richardson Photographic Award

- a. Entries to comprise either 35mm colour slides, colour prints or digital images up to and including 10cm x 15cm in size that are of enlargement quality.
- b. Entries are to consist of two views of any iris, that is:
  - 1) the whole plant (growing in a garden)
  - 2) a close-up of a bloom/s

The above must be two separate photographs, slides or digital images.

- c. Entries to be photographed by a financial member of the New Zealand Iris Society and the award made to the photographer.

**The Cook Photographic Award** for the excellence of photographs of New Zealand-bred and registered irises. Entries are to be photographed by a financial member of the New Zealand Iris Society and the award given to the entry which the judges consider the best photograph.

The photos may be garden shots or showbench shots. There is no requirement for the whole plant to be photographed. For this competition, any size photo up to A4, including the rim or margin is acceptable. The photos must be forwarded as hard copy only.

All entries remain the property and copyright of the photographer but may be used by the Society for publication in the *Bulletin*, on the website, in the slide library or for Society publicity with acknowledgement to the photographer.

### Can't tell whether it's a Dutch iris or a spuria?

Floral arrangers love both Dutch and spuria iris as they make perfect cut flowers. Spurias have especially their tall spikes and it's best to cut the stalks before the blooms open. The quickest way is to tell the difference is to gently dig around the base as a Dutch iris is a bulb and spuria has a rhizome. Also spuria irises have flat leaves with two sides, like bearded irises, Louisianas, Siberians, etc. In terms of biology, both sides of the leaves correspond to the bottom of a leaf of most plants, with the top folded up and hidden inside. The leaves of Dutch irises, on the other hand, have both a top and bottom exposed. The top is "channelled" with slightly raised edges so that rain would run along it.



**Front cover:** Pacific Coast Irises are native to the west coast of America from Seattle to near Mexico. Most are semi-woodland plants that prefer light shade, but *Iris douglasiana* thrives in full sun near the coastline.

*Iris tenax*, *douglasiana*, *innominata* and *munzii* are the most popular and well distributed species in New Zealand and many bright and beautiful new hybrids have been developed from intercrossing these species.

**Left and cover:** A superb seedling by Mary Barrell of Cambridge.





# New Zealand Iris Society Inc.

A society existing for the benefit of the members only and not for the profit of any individual.

Website: <https://www.nziris.org.nz>

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## President's Patch



Hello Everyone,

Welcome to the joys of winter 2021. Please all continue to take care and keep safe.

As you will read in this *Bulletin*, the Convention is in Tauranga this year and the Bay of Plenty Group will not be using buses. I still think by November we may still be wearing masks on public transport, but I cannot look into a crystal ball and see that everything with COVID-19 will be fine by then. What I am particularly looking forward to is seeing each of you at the Convention and enjoying some glorious irises and lovely gardens together.

Groups who are flying in may need to have a rental car, so it would be good if you can share the expense with others in your Group.

Also this year, as changes come about within the banking system with cheques being phased out, so you will have to go online or go to a B.N.Z. to bank.

Your Group will still be collecting all membership subscriptions as usual, but **please read p.38 for clear information and the new procedure.**

All subscriptions will now be handled by the Treasurer.

My sincere thanks to Alison Simpson who has generously been our wonderful Treasurer/ Membership Secretary since November 2003 and later in 2013 became the Membership Secretary as the role of Treasurer/Membership Secretary separated. Alison's continual contributions to our Society are deeply appreciated.

E-Membership will also be on offer and the form to complete will be on the NZIS website.

The Treasurer would prefer that no subscriptions are paid until 1 July.

This year in the far south, I did not have any tall bearded rebloom, but I had versicolours and Siberians; and also a species Siberian sent up flower stalks in February and March. I have never had so many rebloomers before.

Anyone who is entering the Cook Award and the Paul Richardson Award photographic competitions please send the entries directly to the President (- see p. 2 for information).

By the time you receive this *Bulletin*, the *Policies and Procedures (The Working Handbook)* and the *Rule Book* will be on the Members' Section of the website.

Just a thought:

Let's look forward to spring,  
It is nature's way of saying,  
"Let's Party!"

Happy gardening everyone,

*Marilyn*

## Wild Pacifica Irises in Northern California by Kathleen Sayce, California; with photos by Tom Lofken

Tom Lofken lives in northern California and took the photos for this essay over several years.

***Iris douglasiana*** (pictured right)

First up is a tough, widely distributed iris, *Iris douglasiana*, which grows naturally from southern Oregon to southern California near Santa Barbara. Tom Lofken took this image at Point Reyes, where an extensive purple-flowered population can be found.

Yellow, white, rose pink and lavender flowers are also common for this species, which produces some of the toughest plants the Pacifica Iris group for gardens.

***Iris hartwegii* subsp. *pinetorum*** (pictured below left)

Next, from the Sierra Nevada foothills,

is *Iris hartwegii* subsp. *pinetorum*. This subspecies may eventually be re-elevated to species status as its genetics are distinctly different from other subspecies. *I. hartwegii* subsp. *pinetorum* grows in the California Coast Ranges and Sierra Nevada, where it prefers flat areas in open pine forests.

[I grow ***Iris hartwegii* subsp. *australis*** in my garden. This subspecies grows only in the Transverse Ranges of

southern California.]

***Iris macrosiphon*** (pictured right)

*Iris macrosiphon* is widespread in northern California and also varies in flower color. It is found around the Bay Area in the mountains, and north in the Coast Range to the Klamath Range, northern California.

*I. macrosiphon* has a very long ovary tube — the ‘stem’ between the ovary and the flower petals. The leafy bracts in the photo cover the long tube. The ovary sits just above the base of the bracts and well below the flower.





**Left:** *Iris tenuissima* subsp. *tenuissima*.

***Iris tenuissima* subsp. *tenuissima*** (left)  
*Iris tenuissima* subsp. *tenuissima* is found in northern California, in the Sierra Nevada foothills and Coast Range. Flowers are pale yellow to white, with dark maroon to red veins.



***Iris bracteata***  
(pictured right). *Iris bracteata* grows in northern California and southern Oregon, has pale yellow flowers with dark veins, often with a reddish color to the perianth tube, and is typically found in yellow pine forests above 1000 ft elevation. This photo is from Josephine County, Oregon.



***Iris chrysophylla***  
(pictured left)

*Iris chrysophylla* has strikingly long stigmatic crests (those petal bits that stick up on the style arms). These look like two long teeth (a vampire's long canines) in an otherwise typical wild Pacifica Iris flower. Flowers are usually pale yellow, can be white, and are veined burgundy on the falls. This species grows in open coniferous forests in northern California and southern Oregon.

***Iris thompsonii*** (pictured below right)

Tom Lofken looked for the golden iris, *Iris innominata* in northern California, which grows wild only in southern Oregon. It has lovely yellow (dark gold to pale yellow) flowers. Instead, he found a hybrid of *Iris thompsonii*, possibly crossed with *Iris bracteata* or *I. tenuissima*, showing pale petals, strong veining, and growing in densely floriferous clumps.

Like *I. innominata*, *I. thompsonii* is deciduous, with leaves dying back to the ground each winter. Other species that share this trait are *Iris tenax* and *I. hartwegii*.

**Taxonomy:** For current taxonomy, refer to The Jepson Manual, 2nd edition, for a key to iris species in this subsection. All taxa except *Iris tenax* subsp. *tenax* and subsp. *gormanii* are covered in this key.

Older taxonomy references include Victor Cohen, *A field guide to species*, and Lee Lentz's books.

(First published in the AIS World of Iris blog, December 2020.)



## Pacific Coast Iris by Kathleen Sayce



**Right:** Pacific Coast iris blooming in spring. (Photo: courtesy of Wild Ginger Farm)

**Pacific Coast iris** (Iris, beardless section Californicae and cultivars, Iridaceae)

**History:** Pacific Coast iris are native to the West Coast, from southern California to southwest Washington, in and west of the Sierra Nevada, Cascade, and Coast ranges. The highest diversity of species is in Northern California and southern Oregon. First cultivated and hybridized in England in the late 19th century from species seed collected in California. In the early 20th century, gardeners in California and Australia began to hybridize, starting with wild seeds from *I. douglasiana* and *I. innominata*.

**Best features:** Evergreen plants with brilliant jewel-toned flowers in a wide color range with intricate patterning. Suitable for border planting at the front to middle of the beds, for dry meadows with one annual fall mowing, or open woodland gardens with partial to full shade. Generally disease resistant with little annual maintenance needed to keep in good condition. Deer do not find PC iris palatable, though they will eat the occasional flower bud or tug out a seedling to taste. As with other irises, slugs and snails eat flowers but do not damage the vegetative parts of the plants.

**Hardiness:** On the West Coast, PC iris are grown widely in gardens from southern British Columbia in Canada to southern California, west of the Cascade and Sierra Nevada ranges.

**Conditions:** Pacific Coast iris require well-drained, acidic soils that are damp to wet in winter or buried under snow, and somewhat moist to dry in summer. They prefer full

sun along the northwest coast, to full shade in very hot dry climates. In the Central Valley of California, they need shade and summer water.

PC iris flower best if divided every three to five years. Optimal planting and transplanting times are late fall to winter and early spring to late spring; to improve success, check for fresh white roots before transplanting. Fertilizers should

**Left:** *Iris innominata*. (Photo: Lewis & Adele Lawyer)





be acidic.

**Bloom time:** Late winter to early summer, with a few cultivars flowering mid-winter, and some in July. The occasional plant reblooms in fall.

**Species:** Douglas iris (*Iris douglasiana*) grows along the coast from southern Oregon to southern California in coastal meadows in the salt-spray zone. Colors range from white, yellow, pink, blue, and lavender to purple, usually with a yellow signal. Golden iris (*Iris innominata*) is native to southern Oregon and extreme northern California. It has yellow to golden flowers with dark veins and is hardier than most PC iris species. The first named PC iris selection, 'Aureonymphé', was an *Iris innominata* selection in England.

Tough-leaved or Oregon iris (*Iris tenax*) is native to Oregon and southwest Washington. Like *I. douglasiana*, it has a very wide range of flower colors and, like *I. innominata*, is very cold tolerant. Falls usually have darker veins with a gold to yellow signal.



### Playing Favorites

PC iris typically flower from seed in two years, so new plants and hybrids can be developed relatively quickly. There are hundreds of hybrids available. Current hybridizing programs in the US and Australia now grow new PC iris cultivars that are 50 or 60 generations removed from the original species, with color and patterning more spectacular with each generation.

The following list of hybrids on pp. 10–11 is a very brief introduction to this colorful section of iris:

(First published by the Pacific Horticulture Society.)

**Above:** 'Blue Plate Special', light blue with a dark blue halo, blue veins, and a yellow signal. (Photo: Ken Walker)

**Right:** 'Broadleigh Sybil', rose falls, dark rose halo, yellow signal, and light rose standards and style arms. (Photo: Jay & Terry Hudson)

**Below:** 'Canyon Snow', white flowers with a gold blotch on falls. (Photo: Richard C. Richards)





**Left:** 'Cashing In': yellow and very ruffled. (Photo: Ken Walker)

**Right:** 'Curlique': ruffled, wide purple and white plicata petals with a yellow signal and streak. (Photo: Ken Walker)



**Left:** 'Distant Nebula': lavender with dark purple signal and veins. (Photo: Ken Walker)

**Right:** 'Dracularity': ruffled red falls with white rim, dark red veins and black signal, red standards with light gold and red style arms. (Photo: Richard C. Richards)



**Above left:** 'Distant Nebula': lavender with dark purple signal and veins. (Photo: Ken Walker)

**Above centre:** 'Egocentric': rose falls with yellow cream and red signal, yellow cream style arms and rose standards. (Photo: Debby Cole)

**Above right:** 'Eyes Have It': rose purple with darker veins and signal and a yellow streak. (Photo: Ken Walker)



**Left:** 'Fallen Plums': dark rose purple falls with lighter rose standards and white style arms. (Photo: Ken Walker)



**Right:** 'Mendocino Blue': blue flowers with slightly darker wisteria-blue falls, darker blue halo and veining, and turquoise mid-rib wash; signals are lighter hyacinth-blue with darker veining. (Photo: Jay & Terry Hudson)



**Left:** 'Mission Santa Cruz': rosy red-magenta flowers. (Photo: Ken Walker)



**Right:** 'Public Eye': white with dark purple veins and signal, white standards, and purple style arms. (Photo: Bob Seaman)



**Left:** 'New Blood': very dark red with a lighter signal and yellow style arms. (Photo: Ken Walker)



**Right:** 'Vain': pale yellow with darker veins and white signal. (Photo: Ken Walker)



**Left:** 'Oxymoron': ruffled, deep henna falls have a neon violet signal and yellow style arms. (Photo: Ken Walker)



**Right:** 'Valley Banner': white with dense purple veins on falls, white standards and purple style arms. (Photo: Richard C. Richards)

## The Thrill is Seeing What New Varieties You Have Created by Mary Barrell, Cambridge

Coming from America's west coast, Pacific Coast species (PCs) are rhizomatous, but they lack the bristle-like "beards" on the lower petals (falls) seen on bearded irises. Instead of the beard, they have a signal or marked area below the style arms and so they are in the beardless iris category.

Although there are various other species, there are four species of Pacific native irises which can be used to interbreed in a hybridising programme. The results can be in a colour spectrum from soft pastels to darkest purple depending on the parents selected.



**Above:** One of my recent seedlings.

The most familiar species is *Iris innominata*, which comes from southern Oregon and California. It likes cool, wet winters and dry summers, so does well in much of Otago and Southland.

*I. douglasiana*, whose home territory is southern Oregon, north and central California, has wider petals but does have less attractive leaves. *I. tenax* is more dainty and readily crosses with other Pacific iris species. Those three species grow to about 60cm, but the fourth species, *I. munzii* can reach almost 1m in height. It is endemic to a small part of California in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains at about 600m above sea level.

Pacific Coast iris seed pods ripen in late December and January. Seed can be sown immediately or left until autumn. I sow in April in potting mix with a pH of 6.5–7.0. I use a large, deep pot so that there is space for roots to develop well. Do not use garden soil in a pot as these irises need good drainage to prevent root rot. Fill the pot to two-thirds with potting mix, then top with a 5cm layer of seed-raising mix. Put about 30 seeds into each pot, press them down 2cm and softly cover with the mix.

When COVID-19 struck and we locked down, I found I had no seedraising mix. A local nursery told me to use standard potting mix as they used potting mix regularly to germinate their various annuals. In the Waikato, this is bark-based. The result was that I found I had very delayed germination and, heartbreakingly, I had several pots with zero germination – something unheard of in my hybridising regime.

Fresh seed does not need to be soaked but if

**Right:** ('Now Showing' x 'Urban Legend') X Barrell seedling.





**Above:** Seedling from ('Now Showing' X 'Urban Legend').

strong enough to plant out the following autumn. They will then flower in their third year. Take care with these smaller seedlings as they can be quite different in flower and foliage from their larger siblings.

It is best to let these irises grow undisturbed for a few years. Dividing mature clumps of Pacific Coast iris can be difficult and there is still debate about the perfect time of year. Living in the Waikato, I divide in April or May, but Otago growers recommend doing this task in spring. To tell if your PCs are ready for lifting, scratch away some soil from around the base of the plants and search for new white roots. Consider taking only half the clump for division, leaving the other half in case the divisions do not survive.

The divisions should be of a reasonably good size (such as three fans) and the divided pieces should be kept out of the sun, covered with a moist cloth and planted immediately. Keep the plants well-watered until established.

The most important factor in the garden is good drainage. PCs do not tolerate soils with stagnant water around their roots. Excessive water promotes root damage and various diseases from which the plants cannot recover.

The other important factor in success with Pacific Coast irises is a regular summer watering programme but **do not water in the heat of the day!** Unlike bearded irises, they need a regular supply of water as erratic watering can cause whole clumps to suddenly die off. Once established in your garden, PCs can withstand considerable cold, but mulching is desirable under severe conditions (whether hot or cold). A mulch such as pea straw can be beneficial in maintaining moisture as well as protection from the sun and cold.

Use an acidic fertiliser and a cup of sheep manure annually, plus potash in autumn. As

**Right:** Another of my recent seedlings.



seed is more than a year old, soaking overnight before sowing (even in cold tea) is recommended. Cool conditions are needed, as seed will not germinate in temperatures above about 20°C.

Leave pots in a shaded position, perhaps under a shrub. By spring, seedlings should be 10–15cm tall and any strong seedlings can be planted out into the garden in a semi-shaded position. They should flower the second spring.

Smaller seedlings may require holding over in their pots through the summer until they are

strong enough to plant out the following autumn. They will then flower in their third year. Take care with these smaller seedlings as they can be quite different in flower and foliage from their larger siblings.

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**Right:** Another of my recent seedlings.

they prefer acidic soil, they grow well near azaleas, camellias and rhododendrons.

Rust is the only disease, but it is not a very big problem. More significant is fungal infection which turns plants brown. As soon as it is seen, cut off the infected part and expose the cut rhizome to the sun. Hopefully, this could save a damaged plant.

Hybridising Pacific Iris is easy and 'pollen dabbing' is fun. Be prepared. Take tweezers or a paint brush plus a waterproof pencil and labels with you. Place the pollen from your chosen plant onto your chosen flower. Write a label immediately naming the pod parent first then the pollen parent. What to choose? Serious hybridisers check parentage and breed along family lines adding in any genetics they consider will improve the irises they are working with.

My original source was a packet of seed from Joe Ghio – parentage unknown. Very kind friends from the USA have sent seed that they think I might like; and I have also ordered seed from SPCNI (Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris). Not knowing some parentages has allowed me to make some wild crosses with equally widely varying results. Many 'dogs' have been removed. However seriously or otherwise you take hybridising, going out into the seedling patch in bloom season to see what new seedlings are blooming and hopefully finding something there worthy of naming is a great thrill. Give it a try!

**Below left:** Another of my recent seedlings.

**Below right:** 'Karapiro Classic' (Barrell, M., 2019).



**Above:** 'Karapiro Pearl' (Barrell, M., 2009). **Below:** 'Karapiro Cherry Pie' (Barrell, M., 2019).



## Two New Species in *Iris* Series *Chinenses* (Iridaceae) from South-Central China

by Prof. Carol A. Wilson, PhD,  
University of California, Berkeley, USA

*Iris dabashanensis* C.A. Wilson, sp. nov. and *I. probstii* C.A. Wilson, sp. nov. from China are described and illustrated. Both species occur on grassy slopes in mountainous regions of south-central China. The former is known from the Daba Mountains in rocky, calcareous soils associated with shrubs or mixed conifer and hardwood forests, while the latter is known from a region of karst terrain beside rice fields or under pine woods in Guizhou Province.

Molecular data resolves both species in series *Chinenses* in a subclade that also includes *I. odaesanensis*, while morphologically they are similar to *I. henryi*. These newly described species are two of four members of series *Chinenses* that occur in south-central China.

*Iris* series *Chinenses* G.H.M. Lawr. comprises several Asian species that have short rhizomes, stolons, and small, open flowers where petals and sepals are horizontal. Dykes (1913) included four species in his informal group (the Chinese group), Lawrence (1953) circumscribed the series to include five species, Mathew (1989) recognized six species, and British Iris Society (1997) recognized seven species in the series (see Table below).

Species	Dykes (1913)	Lawrence (1953)	Mathew (1989)	BIS (1997)
<i>I. cavaleriei</i> H. Lév.	Synonym of <i>I. grijsi</i>	Not included	Not included	Not included
<i>I. gracillipes</i> Pamp.	Not yet described	Not included	Not included	Synonym of <i>I. henryi</i>
<i>I. grijsi</i> Maxim.	Chinese group	Series <i>Chinenses</i>	Synonym of <i>I. speculatrix</i>	Synonym of <i>I. speculatrix</i>
<i>I. henryi</i> Baker	Chinese group	Series <i>Chinenses</i>	Series <i>Chinenses</i>	Series <i>Chinenses</i>
<i>I. koreana</i> Nakai	Not yet described	Series <i>Chinenses</i>	Series <i>Chinenses</i>	Series <i>Chinenses</i>
<i>I. minutoaurea</i> Makino	Chinese group	Series <i>Chinenses</i>	Series <i>Chinenses</i>	Series <i>Chinenses</i>
<i>I. odaesanensis</i> Y.N. Lee	Not yet described	Not yet described	Series <i>Chinenses</i>	Series <i>Chinenses</i>
<i>I. proantha</i> Diels	Not yet described	Not included	Sect. <i>Lophiris</i> Tausch	Series <i>Chinenses</i>
<i>I. rossii</i> Baker	Chinese group	Series <i>Chinenses</i>	Series <i>Chinenses</i>	Series <i>Chinenses</i>
<i>I. speculatrix</i> Hance	Section <i>Evansia</i> (Alef.) Baker	Subsect. <i>Evansia</i> Benth.	Series <i>Chinenses</i>	Series <i>Chinenses</i>

The two new species are from south-central China where *I. henryi* Baker and *I. proantha* Diels also occur, although none of their distributions overlap.

*Iris minutoaurea* Makino, *I. odaesanensis* Y.N. Lee, and *I. rossii* Baker occur in north-eastern China and adjacent regions in Korea and/or Japan and *I. koreana* Nakai is endemic to Korea.

A species often included in the series, *I. speculatrix* Hance, is widespread in central and southern China. A phylogenetic study of the genus (Wilson 2011) that included five species from series *Chinenses* resolved the series as monophyletic, however, *I. speculatrix* was not sampled.

Guo and Wilson (2013) resolved *I. speculatrix* outside of series *Chinenses* in their study on crested species from several lineages in *Iris*. Tillie et al. (2001) included *I. speculatrix* as well as two series *Chinenses* species, *I. minutoaurea* and *I. rossii*, in their preliminary molecular phylogenetic study on *Iris*.

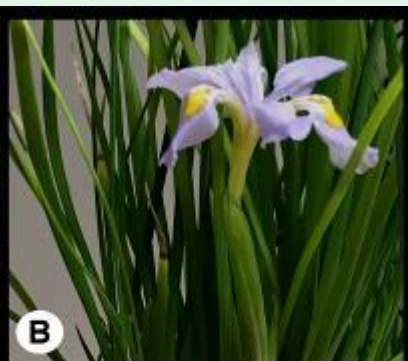
Tillie et al. (2001) resolved *I. minutoaurea* and *I. rossii* as sister species and *I. speculatrix* outside of series *Chinenses*. Mavrodiev et al. (2014) suggested at least 23 genera should be recognized in *Iris* s.l., including a genus representing series *Chinenses* species. Crespo et al. (2015) formalized the splitting of *Iris* and circumscribed species from series *Chinenses* in the genus *Zhaoanthus* M.B. Crespo, Mart-Azorín & Mavrodiev. *Iris speculatrix* was not included in analyses of Mavrodiev et al. (2014) but based on several shared morphological characters was included in *Zhaoanthus* by Crespo et al. (2015).

Both *I. dabashanensis* and *I. probstii* occur in areas that are rocky and considered limestone rich. The border area between Chongqing Municipality and Guizhou Province south of Yanhe, where *I. probstii* occurs, is considered a karst region with a deep layer of limestone and dolomite and characteristic landforms of caves, sinkholes, outcrops, natural bridges and gorges. However, the southern slopes of the Daba Mountains above the Sichuan Plateau where *I. dabashanensis* occurs is not considered a karst region although the soils are calcareous.

This study was undertaken to access the status of these two new species. **The first goal** was to determine morphological similarities and differences among these two new species, *I. dabashanensis* and *I. probstii*, and other species in series *Chinenses*. **A second goal** was to determine if species synonymized in *I. speculatrix* (*I. cavaleriei* and *I. grijsii*) are morphologically similar to *I. speculatrix* and distinct from each of the two new species. **A third goal** was to study materials of *I. henryi* and its illegitimate synonym, *I. gracilipes* Pamp., to determine if these two taxa are morphologically similar. *Iris gracilipes* Pamp. is illegitimate because the name was previously used by Asa Gray for a different species of *Iris* that is in section *Lophiris* Tausch (Gray 1858). **A fourth goal** was to use DNA sequence data to determine if *I. dabashanensis* and *I. probstii* are resolved in series *Chinenses*. **A final goal** was to comprehensively examine collections from southern China to identify previously collected specimens that represent these two new species.

**Fig. 1 on p. 17:** Images: **A–C** *I. dabashanensis*. **D–F** *I. probstii*.  
**A** habit **B** inflorescence **C** flower **D** habit **E** inflorescence **F** flower.  
(Photos: **A** by Mark McDonough; **B–F** by author).







## *Dietes grandiflora* Mystery by Ron Goudswaard

I enjoyed the series in past *Bulletins* on irids by Stephanie Boot, probably because I love irids. Her section on *Dietes* (*Bulletin* 205) was of particular interest because I have grown five of the six species and I still have four in the garden. Only *Dietes robinsoniana* has eluded me and having seen how big they grow (Mary Richardson had one nearly 2m high), I haven't tried to grow it.

*Dietes bicolour*, *flavida*, *butcheriana* and *iridioides* are flowering at present as I write this ... and a mystery dietes which I acquired about a year ago. (I saw it flowering at a garden I was helping with and I begged a piece. The owner thought it was a weed, so I soon put her right on that aspect!) *Dietes grandiflora* has its name because of its large flowers (nearly 4½ inches in diameter according to the Kew Gardens website). The flowers of my mystery irid, are bigger again, over 5" (130mm) – see photo above.

The next part of the mystery is the description of the flower. Most authorities, like Clive Innes, describe *Dietes grandiflora* as having distinctive brown markings at the base of the inner petals. You need only to Google images for *Dietes grandiflora* and you will see lots of them, and the markings are noticeably absent from all the other dietes species, including my mystery dietes. My mystery dietes does have some "leakage" of the lavender colour from the style arms at the very base of just some of the inner petals on just some of the flowers. Which means that my mystery iris has almost the same colouring as *Dietes iridioides*, but my *Dietes iridioides* is less than 70mm in diameter, and the official description from Kew is for 35mm long petals.

The final part of the mystery is growth habit. My *Dietes iridioides* does not grow tall (less than half a metre) and will thrive virtually anywhere: full sun, full shade, dry banks or even very damp spots and quickly spreads by continuously elongating flower stems that proliferate (i.e., grow baby plants at intervals along them), making them top heavy so that they grow along the ground as they get longer.

*Dietes grandiflora* with the brown flecks, tends to be taller with numerous upright flower stems and is altogether a much nicer looking garden plant and not so rampant. It is, however, more particular and needs good garden conditions.

And my mystery plant, well, that is a mix of the two. It also needs good garden conditions, i.e., not too dry, grows tall (nearly a metre) and the flower stems start upright but they also keep growing in successive seasons and begin to hang down but I have yet to see any proliferation on the flower stems.

So it is a mystery! *Dietes iridioides*, which has a very wide natural range in Africa, could easily have a range of different forms, which could mean that my mystery plant is a *Dietes iridioides* after all; and *Dietes grandiflora*, which is restricted to the southern tip of Africa, should have a less grand name like *D. midiflora*. Either way it is a lovely plant!

P.S.: Towards the end of summer and a period of hot, dry weather, the flowers of my mystery irid have changed slightly. The flowers are now smaller, around 9cm in diameter, and the two lavender marks at the base of the standards (similar to the brown marks of *Dietes grandiflora*) are now more prevalent and conspicuous, which presumably makes it a form of *Dietes grandiflora*, after all.



**Above:** The Makikihi Trial Garden bed in early bloom showing how lush but crowded the cultivars had become.

## Makikihi Trial Garden Update by Heather Sell, South Canterbury Iris Group

While we are proud to have the Trial Garden at Makikihi for tall bearded irises, we are also extremely proud to have a display garden surrounding it with dwarf, intermediate, other tall bearded, species, spurias, Louisianas, Siberian and bulbous irises.

This year we felt that the soil needed revamping, plus we had acquired new tall bearded irises. Time for a working bee to dig out all the older tall bearded, refresh the soil and plant out a great variety of old and new irises. What an achievement for the many willing members who came during the two days to achieve this! We look forward to the spring when we shall see the positive result of our labours. There are still the irises in the Trial Garden waiting to flower and for our judges to assess them for their quality.

We will not hold a seminar this year but will have Stephanie Boot give us a presentation about her experience judging for the 54th Annual International Competition for new cultivars of tall bearded hybrids held in Florence. The irises are sent from hybridisers around the world and planted in a section of Giardino dell'Iris below the Piazzale Michelangelo and grown for three years. In their third spring, they are judged three times over a week by each of the panel and the results collated.

The judging is anonymous with each entry identified by a code. There are fifteen awards for a variety of features of the irises with the major award being the Premio Firenze, the gold florin. There is also a special award for the best red iris because a red iris on a white flag is the emblem of Florence. At the end of the week, there is a very special awards ceremony in the Town Hall. The judges are generously hosted in Florence by the Italian Iris Society.

**Below left:** The Makikihi Trial Garden bed with all irises removed, divided and tidied, and the soil rejuvenated with compost and fertilisers. **Below right:** One of the refreshed beds with the new tall bearded irises planted in readiness for spring bloom.





## NZIS National Convention 2021 Information

As we wish to keep the registration fee as low as possible, this year's Convention is being run along similar lines to our Safaris in that members will be required to provide their own transport and some meals.

It is suggested that if members are flying in, it would be a good idea to carpool with others where possible to reduce the cost of rental vehicles.

Registrations on Friday 12 November will begin at 4:30–6:00p.m. in the Oak Room at the Greerton RSA.

This room is adjacent to the Restaurant where a smorgasbord is available for those wishing to dine there. The cost is \$32 per person but may be subject to a small increase during the year. Other options include several different takeaways in Greerton, a Countdown supermarket or other restaurants in the area, e.g., The Tauranga Crossing (at the Lakes development).

Saturday is our garden day with morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea provided. These gardens will be in and around Tauranga and there will be garden judging for those wishing to participate at Keith & Christina Braybrook's garden.

Saturday night's dinner is at members' own cost.

Sunday is our in-house day starting at 9:00 a.m. with everything scheduled to take place in the Oak Room. The Judging School and Judges' meeting will be held in an adjacent room.

All meals are provided on Sunday including a smorgasbord dinner that night.

There will be slides, guest speakers, our normal presentations and our AGM all held during the day.

Monday will include more garden visits. Morning tea will be at Palmers Bethlehem (at members' own cost) but lunch will be provided at the last garden.

At this stage, we are estimating that Monday will finish at around 1:30pm allowing time for those who wish to travel home or visit other gardens in the Katikati area.

There is no accommodation available at the RSA this year, but the Cameron Thermal Motel is close by. They have a gate which will be unlocked to allow guests to walk through to the RSA making for easy access between the two venues.

There will be raffles, an auction (including seed donated by Jim Geditz and Chad Harris) on Sunday and plant sales at various gardens during visits.



# New Zealand Iris Society National Convention 2021 Registration Form

Friday 12 to Monday 15 November 2021



**BAY OF PLENTY  
IRIS GROUP 2021**

**Venue:** Tauranga RSA,  
1237 Cameron Road, Greerton, Tauranga

Name(s) .....

Name(s) on tag(s) .....

Address .....

..... Postcode.....

Phone..... Email: .....

NZ Iris Group .....

Do you wish to:

- attend the Judges' Training Workshop? Yes / No
- sit the Judge's exam? Yes / No
- have your name and address included in the Guest List? Yes / No

Do you have special dietary requirements? .....

**Registration fee for Friday to Monday:** \$150.00 per person

**Registration fee includes:** Dinner Sunday night (drinks available at your cost).

Lunches each day. Morning/afternoon teas on Saturday and Sunday only. Monday: morning tea at your cost.

**Please register by 20 September 2021 and forward the completed form to the**

**Registrar:** Cris Savage, 601 Pukehina Parade, RD 9, Te Puke 3189 or

Email to [spreckles10@yahoo.co.nz](mailto:spreckles10@yahoo.co.nz)

**Internet Banking:**

Westpac A/c No: 03 0435 0457755 00 NZ Iris Society Bay of Plenty

**\*\*Please include your name in the Reference. No cheques please\*\***

A late fee of \$30.00 will apply after 21 September till 20 October 2021.

No registrations will be accepted after this date.

**Accommodation:**

Cameron Thermal Motel (next door to RSA) Ph: 07 578 2859. **Please book early due to limited accommodation.**

Academy Motor Inn (approx. 5km away) Ph: 07 578 9103

# Pronouncing Botanical Latin: a Personal Perspective

by Tom L. Waters, Scientist at Los Alamos  
National Laboratory, New Mexico, USA



## No One Knows How to Say It

As a passionate student of both horticulture and language, this is a subject I have strong interest in. If you search the web (or a library) looking for guidance on how to pronounce a particular Latin name, you will quickly find an array of conflicting recommendations. You are also likely to see such recommendations prefaced by a remark such as the following (no, I cannot bear to link to this site): Relax! The good news is there is NO "correct" way to pronounce them! You may pronounce them any way you wish, and you will be just as "correct" as any PhD botanist.

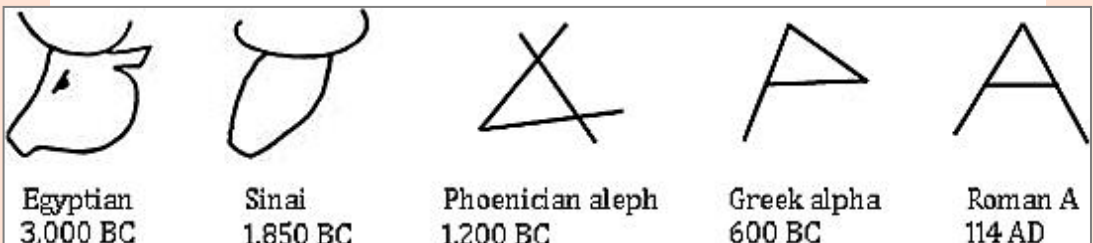
So have confidence, and just say them however feels comfortable to you. Anyone who corrects you is only showing their own ignorance, and the correct response is to just smile and say "Yes, that's what I said", (and repeat the name as you pronounced it before).

In my experience, the more strident the assertion that there is no correct pronunciation, the more scattered and arbitrary the pronunciation advice that follows. Still, the sentiment above has been expressed in milder form by a number of respected writers knowledgeable in botanical Latin, including the modern pontiff on the subject, WT Stearn:

*How they are pronounced really matters little provided they sound pleasant and are understood by all concerned...*

Now one can hardly take exception to the pragmatic assertion that the purpose of language is to communicate, and if one is communicating successfully, there is no cause for anxiety or concern. Yet it strikes me as odd that people writing about the pronunciation of botanical names so often feel obliged to include such a disclaimer. Writers on other disciplines do not. When was the last time you read a chemistry text that reassured students with: "You can say OX-i-gen, ox-EYE-gen, or OH-zee-gen, and they are all correct"?

From the standpoint of linguistics, which regards the spoken language as primary and the written language as secondary, it is quite a strange circumstance that a community of speakers would not know how to say the words they use. How did this come about?





### A Little History of Latin as Spoken in England

Long after the fall of the Roman Empire, Latin remained the *lingua franca* of Europe, particularly among the learned. Although it ceased to be a native language, it did not cease to be a spoken language. Even into the nineteenth century, classically educated people in Europe would converse in Latin, as well as writing and reading it. Because

the language was in continuous use, its pronunciation changed with the locale and the era, as does the pronunciation of any language. Especially significant were the changes that occurred in England.

During the Middle English period, English experienced what is known as "the great vowel shift", which dramatically changed the sounds of the long vowels: 'A' went from being "ah" to "ay", 'E' from "eh" to "ee", and 'I' from "ee" to "eye". Thus the Old English *mis* (pronounced "mees") became Modern English *mice*.

Keep in mind that this shift in pronunciation was not something people were conscious of; it happened gradually over several generations. The older pronunciations were forgotten. And the change carried the pronunciation of Latin words with it. So as "mees" changed to "mice", so *linum* (Latin for "flax") changed from "LEE-num" to "LYE-num". (Of course, there have been many other changes in English pronunciation between when the Romans introduced Latin to England and the present day, but these are some of the most pertinent for the present discussion.) Other pronunciation changes were happening all over Europe, so that Latin as pronounced in England was different from Latin as pronounced in Germany, which was different again from Latin as pronounced in France.

As many of our modern sciences blossomed from the seventeenth century onward, they took their terminology from Latin. Botany was no exception: following Linnaeus' system of binomial nomenclature, every species was assigned a genus name and species name, both in Latin form (although the root words from which these names were formed were often Greek or from some other language).

In England, these Latin (or Latinized) names were all pronounced as Latin was pronounced in England at the time. There was at this time no disagreement over the pronunciation of words in Latin. Even those constructed on Greek roots were easy to pronounce for anyone with a classical education (just as people of our generation knew how to pronounce "internet" when the word first appeared, since although it was a new word, it was made up of familiar components.) Furthermore, many technical terms were adopted straight from Latin into English, with perhaps only a minor change in form. Many of these borrowings from Latin are transparent to us today: *area*, *species*, *orbit*, *formula*, *momentum*.

### Just When You Thought It Was Safe to Open Your Mouth...

By the late nineteenth century, linguists had worked out, based on careful study of ancient sources and comparisons



Some tips to remember  
Botanical Latin

ROOTSANDMAPS.COM



between the various Romance languages, how Latin was actually pronounced in the classical era of Caesar and Cicero. Latin began to be taught according to this reconstructed classical pronunciation, rather than the English pronunciation that had been familiar up to that time. This was a positive change in terms of appreciating the previously forgotten sounds of the ancient language, but it gave rise to problems in using the Latin or Latinized technical vocabulary of the sciences. In most cases, the traditional English pronunciation was retained, as the words had already become quite familiar. Thus *species* remained "SPEE-sheez" (the traditional English pronunciation), rather than becoming "SPEK-ee-ess" (the classical pronunciation).

Note: I've come across a few references that erroneously use the word "traditional" to refer to the reconstructed classical pronunciation of Latin. In this context, the word "traditional" does not mean "oldest", but instead refers to what has been handed down through tradition (with changes along the way), rather than what has been reconstructed by linguists studying ancient Latin.

But for words less often encountered, such as the names of lesser-known genera and species, English speakers after 1900 were left in a state of uncertainty. The traditional English pronunciation was no longer being taught, and fewer people had any instruction in Latin at all. So, from the 20th century on, people encountering a Latin species name for the first time would either (1) use the traditional English pronunciation if they could infer it from the pronunciation of similar names they had actually heard spoken; (2) use the classical Latin pronunciation if they had learned this in school or from books; or (3) make something up.

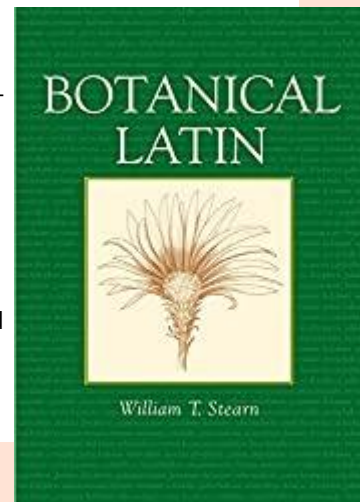
You will find all of these approaches evidenced in the pronunciation guides now in circulation, almost always mixed together without much attempt at consistency.

Botany (or biology, more broadly speaking), I think, has suffered worse from this confusion than the other sciences that make use of Latin terms, simply because we have so many names to contend with (many of which will be encountered in writing before they are ever heard), rather than a manageable set of technical terms whose pronunciation is reinforced by use in conversation. It is small wonder that writers on the subject have given up trying to maintain a pronunciation system that is shared by all.

### OK. Now What?

So what is one to do, assuming that one is actually interested in pronouncing the names in a way that has some basis in linguistic tradition, rather than just arbitrary guesswork? For me, it comes down to two viable choices: (1) use the traditional English pronunciation; or (2) use a mixture of the traditional and classical systems, informed and tempered by the practices of the people you converse with.

Why not just use the classical pronunciations exclusively? Surely this has the best claim to being the "real" pronunciation of Latin. The reason is that many plant names have become familiar in their traditional English pronunciation, and they are here to stay. *Iris* itself is a perfect example. The classical pronunciation is "EE-ris". Try this at your next local iris society meeting or at your local nursery and see how it





goes.

Many other examples are easy to come by. Who is going to talk of "gair-AH-ni-ums" instead of "jer-AY-ni-ums"? "SAY-dum" instead of "SEE-dum"? "nar-KISS-us" instead of "nar-SISS-us"? (If you do adopt a consistently classical pronunciation, though, you will come closer to the way many non-English speakers pronounce the names.)

My own inclination is to use the traditional English pronunciation, up to the point where it isolates me from contemporary practice in my area. An example is the term *plicata*, which is "pli-KAH-ta" classically and "pli-KAY-ta" traditionally. In North America, at least, I don't ever expect to hear the latter as the name for the familiar iris color pattern – or the pseudo-species for which it was named.

I will, however, say "re-tik-yoo-LAY-ta", "flor-en-TYE-na", and "hoog-i-AY-na", even though I often hear "ret-tik-yoo-LAH-ta", "flor-en-TEE-na", and "hoog-i-ANN-a". The traditional English pronunciations have several advantages. We can use English words borrowed from Latin as a pronunciation guide (*alpine* helps us pronounce *alpinus*, *albino* helps us pronounce *albinus*, *variegated* helps us pronounce *variegata*, etc.) It also provides a consistency that reinforces the pronunciation of common elements in different names, and thus makes new names easier to pronounce when you encounter them. Finally, it connects us to the English-speaking botanists and gardeners of the past, who knew no other way to pronounce Latin. WR Dykes and Sir Michael Foster are excellent company, in my view.

If you mix traditional and classical pronunciations (provided you get your mix from listening to others, rather than randomly), then your choices are less likely to stand out in your locality, and will probably come closer to what people in your area would expect, having encountered the names only in writing.

### Etiquette

Just in case anyone should interpret the above to imply that I'm some kind of obsessive pronunciation enforcement officer, have no fear. It is bad manners to correct anyone's pronunciation, particularly in an area where informed people can and do have different preferences.

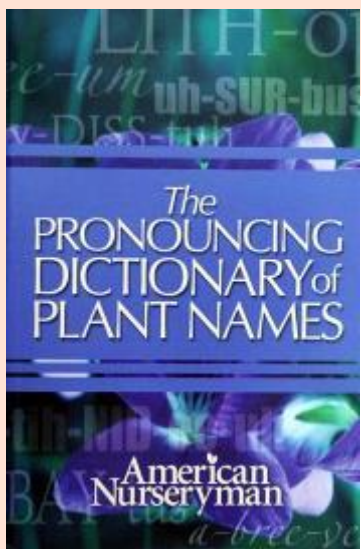
My approach is to respect others' informed choices, to encourage struggling beginners (–it's much more important that they want to talk about iris species at all than that they pronounce them well), and to work to inform myself as best I can, so that I can be a resource to others if asked. In my experience, the oft-cited unpleasantness of people correcting each other's pronunciation is a rarity.

### An Anecdote in Three Parts

Let me conclude with a story of one iris name and its pronunciation, spanning several decades. When I was a teenager, I was already interested in Latin and knew its (classical) pronunciation rules. In one of our iris society round robins (a sort of pre-internet discussion group, conducted through the quaint media of paper, typewriters



Above: *Iris xiphium* or Spanish iris.



and envelopes), the question came up of how to pronounce *Iris pseudacorus*. I asserted that *pseuda-* meant "false" and that I didn't know whether *corus* had a long or short o in Latin, which would determine which syllable to stress.

Bee Warburton, one of the iris world's luminaries, patiently explained that there is a plant called *Acorus*, the sweet flag, that the prefix *pseudo-* lost its -o- in the compound, and that *Acorus* is stressed on the first syllable. So the pronunciation can only be "sood-ACK-or-us". It was my first encounter with the names as living words, words that could be understood if you knew about the plants as well as the language.

Recently, while attending an open house at an amazing display garden in my area, someone remarked on irises growing in a watercourse, and asked if they were Louisianas. The

garden owner said they were not, but could not recall the name. He said they were the *fleur-de-lis*. Being helpful, I suggested *pseudacorus*. Because I was stressing the *a* instead of the *o*, he didn't recognize my suggestion as being the same as the name he had read in books. I mention this because it provides a cautionary note to the oft-repeated advice to "say it however you like, people will understand". There are some advantages to using a shared pronunciation.

Finally, out of curiosity, I decided to try to verify Warburton's assertion that the *a* is stressed, and that it is short. Internet searches quickly revealed many websites stating with authority that the pronunciation is "sood-AY-cor-us", many others stating with authority that it is "sood-ACK-or-us", plenty holding out for "sood-a-COR-us", and one lone site with enough honesty (or bewilderment) to offer a choice of pronunciations. None of them provided the etymology in enough detail that I could verify the vowel lengths in either Latin or Greek.

In this research game, you soon find that the older the source, the more reliable, consistent, and informed it is likely to be. If you can get back to the nineteenth century, any book you find is likely to be written by someone who actually knew some Latin and Greek, and who had a good idea what the words meant and how they had been adapted. Sure enough, I eventually came upon *A Manual of Scientific Terms: Pronouncing, Etymological, and Explanatory; Chiefly Comprising Terms in Botany, Natural History, Anatomy, Medicine, and Veterinary Science: with an Appendix of Specific Names*, by the Reverend James Stormonth (1885, digitized by Google), wherein I learned that all three vowels are short in Greek *akoros* as well as in Latin *acorus*. Bee was right all along. Not that I doubted that.

#### Footnote: -oides

One often finds, in pronunciation guides that are informed and careful, the advice that this ending, common in plant names, should be pronounced "oh-EYE-deez". The reasoning is sound: *-ides* comes from Greek *-eidos*, "resembling", with the -o- as a connective. Thus the *i* is long, and the short *o* is separate from it.

Yet strangely, I kept encountering venerable and reliable sources suggesting it be



Above: *Iris xiphioides* or English iris.

pronounced "OY-deez". Why should that be? I learned that in the traditional English pronunciation of Latin, when two vowels are in hiatus, the first usually became long. Furthermore, *oi* is a diphthong in Anglo-Latin, though an uncommon one. Since most of the words with this ending are coined technical terms, not natural borrowings into Latin from Greek, early speakers of scientific Latin in England may have had some latitude in pronunciation, whether to regard the *-oi-* as a diphthong or not. In the cases where a coined Latin word with this ending was borrowed fully into English (*asteroid* being a prime example), the *-oi-* was pronounced as a diphthong. "OY-deez" is certainly more natural for English speakers than the trisyllabic alternative.

Interesting factoid.

VOTE NOMINATE STAND ELECT

VOTE NOMINATE STAND ELECT



## 2021 Annual General Meeting Notice

**Elections** will be held this year. Nominations close on **25 July. Please send the applications to the Secretary.** Positions vacant:

- Vice President (This person needs to be able to step up to this position in 2022.)
- Secretary
- Two Committee Members.

**It is critical that the Society is run with a full complement of Executive Officers.**

Please think about these positions as they **MUST** be filled. Your involvement in our Society is important. Please do not think that someone else will do this, otherwise we will have no nominations. Please be involved.

**Voting will close on 12 September.**

The Treasurer will be the Returning Officer because the Secretary's position is becoming vacant this year.

All nominations should be sent to the Secretary:

Christina Braybrook, 497E Joyce Road, RD3 Tauranga 3173  
or emailed to: [nzis.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:nzis.secretary@gmail.com)

VOTE NOMINATE STAND ELECT VOTE

## Companion Plants for Bearded Iris: Focus on Colour, Texture and Balance by Bernard Pryor OAM

A centuries-old gardening tradition, companion planting is a practice which follows the theory that different plant species, when planted closely together, assist each other by controlling pests, attracting pollinators, and other factors necessary for their full productivity. This practice is clearly beneficial in flower gardens when one takes colour and texture into consideration to provide not only complementary aesthetic balance but contrast and visual variety.

Firstly, consider the glauca (grey-blue) colour of bearded iris leaves. When combined with feathery-leaved silver artemisia or the fountain-like shapes of various grasses or the rounded leaves of cottage geraniums, you have foliar variety that immediately provides interest in the cottage garden. The architectural impact of upright iris leaves is significant as they carry a visual effect in the garden beyond just the flowering. The pleasurable challenge of planting irises is not just one of colour — that is, making a floral focus for a fleeting moment in time — but of continuing the foliar display through an extended period in the garden.

You might choose mainly perennials to accompany your irises but, by adding some annuals into the mix, you achieve a quick splash of colour among your plants. The blend of annuals and perennials gives the iris gardens a balanced appeal with their varied heights, colours, leaf shapes and textures. They also lengthen the display of blooms throughout spring. You might, for example, choose TB 'Thornbird' (- see below) in its hues of golden-beige with purple beards and combine it with dark purple aquilegia, red-violet johnny-jump-ups and any perennial with a soft golden tone.



Irises combine well with most other perennials, annuals and bulbs. Some suggested companion plants include alliums, daylilies, echinacea, lavender, gaillardia, rudbeckia, phlox, sedum, peonies, Icelandic and oriental poppies, delphiniums, lupins, shasta daisies, rudbeckia, and clematis to brighten the garden beds.

Bearded iris may already be a part of your garden and you want companion plants to make the different areas more diverse. However, companion plants for irises must

allow for air flow and ventilation more than anything else. Plants that allow moisture to remain near the surface are not good for bearded iris cultivation as they can easily promote rot during warm temperatures.

Begin by being aware of the heights of your bearded irises, for example, a dwarf bearded iris will be overwhelmed by taller perennials and could easily rot out if smothered. Most important with companion plants is to avoid planting things that require too much water or that smother the iris rhizomes, either of which produces conditions conducive to bacterial rot. For dwarves, select low growing plants, such as alyssum or heuchera and smaller spring bulbs, and choose ones with colours that tone or contrast each other.

Bearded irises are available in every colour of the rainbow and within themselves carry an array of colours as more new hybrid cultivars are being released to the public.



**Left:** Various shades of alliums blend well with irises like pristine white TB 'Skating Party' and underplanted with vivid, complementary dianthus. Statuesque purple *Allium giganteum* is pictured bottom left.

The combination of **bearded iris and allium** is the grand finale of the spring bulb flower season as alliums are some of the last bulbs to bloom. Available in purple, pink or white, the colour combinations of alliums with bearded iris are expansive. Additionally, the contrast of the globular allium flowering heads both in height and shape as well as colour is eye-catching. Purple *Allium giganteum*, for example, seen above left, is suited to cut flower production and produces flowers in early summer. It is very suited to the drier coastal or inland areas of Southern New Zealand.

**Bearded iris and Cranesbill geranium:** The sprawling habit of Cranesbill, also known as

hardy geranium, pairs well with bearded iris, such as 'Silverado' below. The low



growing habit of cranesbill planted in front of the bearded iris makes for a delightful combination. Some varieties of cranesbill have a bloom season that begins in late spring and extends into summer. Most cranesbill will bloom heaviest in late spring to early summer which is the same bloom time as bearded iris. Lovely blue-violet geraniums look stunning planted with either pastel or deep, rich blue irises.



Annual **marigolds** planted near TB 'Gypsy Romance' create a dazzling bicolor display.



Gentle **Erigeron** in pastel tones of whites and pinks (pictured left and right) both soften and contrast the erect and statuesque bearded iris foliage and blooms.



**Below:** The rich purple hues of tall bearded 'Dusky Challenger' tone well with (left) profuse flowering, dry soil tolerant **Nepeta** (Catmint) in various forms from 'Giant Blue' to dwarf forms (*racemosa*) and hardy **Scabiosa columbaria** (Pincushion Flower) which bears lavender flowers on branched stems from early summer and well into autumn.



## Announcement: Rangitikei Iris Group Inaugural Workshop/Seminar

4 September 2021

Palmerston North Leisure Centre,  
569 Ferguson Street, Palmerston North

A day of talks pertaining to irises along with a sales table.

Further details will be posted on Facebook.

Visit: <https://www.facebook.com/Iris-Flowers-Palmerston-North-Rangitikei-Group-169125720665726?>

Contact person: Julie Warren on 021 110 9218



Above: *Iris spuria* subsp. *carthaliniae*.  
(Photo by Carole Flyger)

### Unexpected Delight by Carole Flyger

Conventions bring back many memories and discovery of new and different irises. One of my clear recollections was visiting the garden of Pearl and Eric Braybrook at the Gisborne Convention in 2008. As Eric was breeding irises and had registered some, I was looking forward to seeing his range of tall bearded irises. From my recollection, the whole backyard was planted in tall bearded irises in full flower. At that stage, I had recently planted his cultivar 'Eric's Dream' which I had been taken with at the Gisborne Show the previous

year.

The visitors to the gardens were delighted by all the irises in bloom, including his seedlings and registered irises that were neatly labelled in the rows. But it was not the blooms at the back of the house that seemed to get the most attention. There was a beardless iris at his gateway that took a lot of the interest from those entering the property.

Standing defiantly and self-assured was *Iris spuria* subsp. *carthaliniae*, also known as *Iris carthaliniae*. It was a very pleasant surprise to find a species in bloom when the expectation of visitors was to see mostly bearded irises. Eric had grown the plant from seed obtained from the Seed Pool. This being one of several other irises (in bloom) he was growing that had also come from the Seed Pool

The next year I managed to get some *I. spuria* subsp. *carthaliniae* but do not recall who

supplied the seed. I am sure that there would have been a great demand for it that season. It has taken several years for me to get the plant established and blooming but well worth the wait. My plant is well established now and growing on the northern side of the house where it does not get a lot of watering.

Its native habitat in the Caucasus is wet marshy ground, illustrating how hardy this iris can be in growing in a wide range of conditions. It has been found that they grow well in areas where summer herbaceous plants are grown that like plenty of water during summer.

Unlike a lot of the spuria species, this example does not grow tall and is suitable for the smaller garden. The slender, upright, rigid leaves grow to about 140cm and the flower stalks are a little shorter, but not so short that the blooms are hidden by the foliage. The leaves stay reasonably tidy and do not need a lot of attention to remove the dead foliage. The only maintenance required is to remove the dead flower spikes if any have been left on the plant.

The very elegant flowers that bloom in late October to mid-November are worth waiting for with their sky-blue falls accentuated with slightly deeper veining and the yellow signal as a bold contrast. It is no wonder that so many people stood and admired this beauty that welcomed us to the Braybrook gardens.

I have another miniature spuria iris, also from the Seed Pool, which I am hoping to flower this year. It is *Iris spuria* subsp. *maritima* of which I have several plants but none has flowered yet. They are planted in several areas of the garden and am hoping that I will be able to enjoy at least one bloom.

An interesting note: *I. spuria* was named by Linnaeus in 1753, coming from the Latin meaning “spurious or false” as he thought it was a hybrid.



Above: Marilyn Rathgen's seedling.

## Spuria Iris Care

Spuria iris, once also known as the Butterfly Iris, are widely found in Asia, Africa, and Europe and are popular as an ornamental plant. These rhizomatous, beardless perennials are well suited to New Zealand as they prefer dry summer conditions. Spuria iris come in a range of colours: white, lilac, blue, purple, yellow, reds and brown. Like other irises, the leaves are slender and sword-shaped but tall, from 1–2m. This plant blooms in late spring, towards the end of the tall bearded bloom period and continue flowering until the first part of summer.

Floral arrangers love spurias as they make perfect cut flowers with their tall spikes cut before the blooms open. If you want a good display of this iris in your garden, it is wise to leave the large clumps undisturbed for many



years. They can be used to create dramatic impact in the garden if planted in strategic clumps or can be grown as a striking backdrop in raised flower beds.

### **Iris spuria care:**

Caring for this species is easy as it is a low maintenance plant.

- Spurias prefer well drained and humus rich soil but can also grow in clay soil. It is worth trying them in seaside areas as they also tolerate saline soils and wind.
- They prefer the positions which receive full sun or partial shade. When grown in a shady area, flowering will be reduced. They grow well in areas with hot, dry summer. They need plenty of watering in spring.
- Make sure that you add well-rotted compost to the soil before planting. These plants are heavy feeders and you need to apply bone meal and slow release fertiliser with high phosphate content. You can also use general purpose fertilisers during spring to ensure appropriate growth and flowering.
- Spuria plants do not bloom the first year after dividing them. The foliage of the plant can be cut back to the base to give a neat appearance, but only after the leaves die down a few weeks after the blooms have finished during early summer.

### **Propagating spurias:**

Spurias can be propagated by rhizome division or by seeds.

- If you are looking for flowers which look exactly like the parent plant, it is better not to grow the spuria plant from seed but obtain a rhizome.
- Lift the clumps and divide them and replant them immediately during early autumn when the rhizomes are in a dormant state.
- Cut back the leaves and the roots to 15cm. This cutting back is only to prevent the new, planted spuria iris plant from falling over while the iris is making a new root system and should not be regarded as an annual pruning routine to undertake.
- The rhizomes need to be planted at least 4cm deep in soil. It is necessary to water the divided rhizome well till the plant gets established.
- Seeds are produced in hexagonal-shaped seed capsules if the flowers are hand pollinated or pollinated by bees. Seeds can be sown in a cold frame during the autumn.
- Make sure that you plant seeds well-spaced as they should not be disturbed for many years.
- Plant rhizomes them at least 1m apart. Storing spuria rhizomes under refrigeration before replanting will trigger faster growth and cause earlier blooming.

### **Common problems:**

The most common pests of this plant include thrips, snails and slugs. Diseases are rhizome rot, crown rot, leaf blight and rust. Avoid watering the plant too much in summer to prevent fungal attack. If your *Iris spuria* is not flowering, it may not be receiving full sun or you might have moved it recently. Be prepared to wait for at least two years after shifting to produce blooms.

**Right: Spuria 'Wild at Heart'.**





## Award Winners

Two awards that were presented last year by President Marilyn Fleming were to **Beth Conrad** (pictured left) for the Jean Stevens Writer's Award for her piece on hybridisers in the March 2020 *Bulletin* and to **Alison Nicoll** (right) who won the Jean Stevens Memorial Award for her pink tall bearded iris 'Keith's Gift' ('Lotus Land' X 'Fogbound') grown from imported seed. This is the first time

this prestigious, special award has been presented.

Beth will also be presented with her certificate at the 2021 Convention in Tauranga.

## *Iris cristata* and *Iris lacustris* by Paul Richardson

After a doubtful start, *Iris lacustris* is firmly established as a species and not a dwarf form of *I. cristata*. It can be easily identified by its habit of producing the odd bloom in summer and autumn, whereas *I. cristata* will bloom in spring only. Some American and English sources have reported difficulty in growing the two plants in the same location, but I have not heard such comments made in this country and, so far, see no reason to provide differing conditions for the two species.

Brian Mathew describes the habitat of *cristata* as moist woods and more or less neutral soil. He finds that it grows vigorously on a peat bank which is sufficiently raised to allow free drainage. He treats *lacustris* similarly and comments that although it occurs in moist, sandy gravel and limestone crevices, it does not appear to require an alkaline soil.

Dykes also suggests treating both plants similarly in a cool rather than loose soil in a position that is shaded during the heat of the day. Kohlein mentions an acidic soil but says that *lacustris* will tolerate a more alkaline soil than *cristata*. Cassidy and Linnegar recommend a shady, leafy scree between rocks.

Under New Zealand conditions, it is first necessary to translate recommendations made



**Top left:** *Iris cristata* by Friendsofthewildflowergarden.org  
**Bottom left:** *Iris lacustris* by US Forest Service.



for the Northern Hemisphere and for higher latitudes. It would seem that the general recommendations for soil conditions will probably be appropriate in this country. The suggestion that *lacustris* will tolerate more alkaline conditions than *cristata* might be a useful guide if the former flourishes and the latter does not. In my experience, it is difficult in a small suburban garden to maintain a suitable degree of shade and of moisture content. One is tempted, when planting a new, tiny plant to look to other herbaceous plants to provide shade and it is only too late that one realises that the shade plant has progressed with the season and no longer carries out its duties.

Maintaining the moisture content of the soil is rather like protecting against frost. Any ad hoc solution will inevitably break down and the first short period of

inattention may well be fatal. The only satisfactory solution is to secure a permanent degree of dampness before planting. Similarly with shading. The best source is a large, permanent evergreen bush or tree that will vary only slightly over the seasons.

A third problem is the likely invasion of iris clumps by a groundcover or weeds. Again, the provision of a gravelly mix before planting will make the job of weeding a lot easier. And finally, bearing in mind the conditions of the native habitat, it is helpful in autumn to work in a little leaf mould around the rhizomes.

It is worth noting a comment by the Curator of the Alpine Rock Garden, Denver Botanic Gardens who reported in *SIGNA* No. 31 October 1983: "The soil (on Montane Slope) was amended with sand and much humus so that it now has a light texture. It is kept moist by gentle watering every few days during the hot, dry summer months. It is kept mulched, and a variety of woodland plants from various mountains of the world are being established under the various paperbark and stripebark maples, magnolias and larches. The most dramatic plantings in the section of the garden are extensive mats of different color forms of *I. cristata*. The type/form – a pale lavender – has a mass over 12 feet (4m) across."

There is no fundamental difficulty in satisfying the requirements of these delightful plants but the fact remains, they are seen far too rarely.



**Above:** (from left to right): Frances Love, **Madge Snow**, Elsie Crawford, Karen Glasgow, Helen Falconer and Marcia McElroy pictured on Nov 19 1984 when the late Clark Cosgrove Iris Collection raised \$1730 for the Society.

## Obituary: Madge Snow by Marilyn Fleming

Madge belonged to the Central Otago Group and she was National President of the Society from 1976–1978.

Sadly, she recently passed away in Elmslee Home in Wanaka, aged 89.

I remember being in Madge's garden in 1984 when the Convention was in Central Otago. Madge lived at Morven Hills Station in Tarras and loved cultivating gentians, fritillarias and other small bulbs.

Madge also like to grow a lovely range of arilbreds: 'Bronze Beauty', 'Buddy Mitchell', 'Trophy', 'Desert Buttercup', 'Sultan's Visit' and 'Esther the Queen', were seen blooming in her garden; and also aril-meds: 'Loudmouth' along with Hilmary Catton's 'Rosie Gann' and 'Bird Dancer'.

Madge was a lady who loved her garden and it gave her great pleasure to be able to share it with others.



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# Membership Information

Annual Subscriptions are due on **1 July** each year.

Full membership	\$30	Overseas membership	\$40
Family member	+\$5	Overseas family member	+\$5
Student member	\$5	Overseas membership 3 years	\$100
Half year membership	\$20	Overseas family 3 years	\$115

We would prefer that as many members as possible go through the website ([www.nziris.org.nz](http://www.nziris.org.nz)) to pay their subscription as this will enable you to access the website members' area promptly.

Please, can those members who don't have access to the above pay their Group Treasurer. The Group Treasurer will then send that member's details on to the NZIS Treasurer. All changes of address go directly to the NZIS Treasurer, please.

Family members receive all the privileges and benefits of the Society, except that each family receives only ONE *Bulletin*.

E-members will obtain their *Bulletin* on the website; they have no voting rights but do have access to the Seed Pool if they are resident in New Zealand.

New members joining after 1 January in any year need pay only \$20 (or Family rate \$25) to 30 June, thereafter full subscription rates will apply.

**Non-financial members will not receive *Bulletins*.**

## Items for sale:

CD Registered NZ-Bred Irises	\$15
NZIS Checklists (2009 update)	\$12
NZIS judging handbook	\$15
NZIS badge	\$5
Jean Stevens Chronicles	\$30
<i>Iris Culture in New Zealand</i> by Hilmary Catton	\$5
Back numbers of the <i>Bulletin</i> available – nos. 136–138, 141, 143–154, 156–161, 163–179, 181–189, 191, 195–202	Each @ \$2
Index to <i>Bulletins</i> 1–140	\$3
Prices are inclusive of postage and handling within NZ. Please send orders to the Treasurer (- see contact details on p. 4).	

## NZIS *Bulletin* advertising rates:

Full page colour per issue	\$180	Full page black/white per issue	\$150
Half page colour per issue	\$90	Half page black/white per issue	\$75
		1/5 page black/white per issue	\$20

Until alternative advice is received, existing advertisements will continue to be published, although not necessarily in the same position.

**Deadlines for *Bulletin* content:** **September *Bulletin*:** 20 July 2021  
**March *Bulletin*:** 20 January 2022 and **June *Bulletin*:** 20 April 2022

## Groups Contact Information

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**Bay of Plenty** Meetings held on the last Sunday of each month: Secretary Christina Braybrook, 497E Joyce Road, RD3, Tauranga 3173 Ph. [07] 543 1128 or 021 243 1128.  
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Secretary Mrs Nyla Chubb, Erin Street, RD24, Stratford, Taranaki 4394

**Rangitikei** Meetings held on Tuesday evenings or Sunday afternoon mid-month:  
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**Waikato** Meetings held on the first Wednesday of each month: Secretary Mary Barrell, 45 The Oaks Drive, Cambridge 3432 Ph. [07] 827 0620. Email: marynclive@xtra.co.nz

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**Wellington** In recess.

**Central Otago** Spontaneous meetings. Contact: Cathy Robertson, 319 Earnsclough Rd, Alexandra 9391 Ph. [03] 449 3223. Email: steverobertson@xtra.co.nz

**Christchurch** Secretary Emma O'Connell 47 Riselaw Street, Mairehau, Christchurch 8013. Ph. [03] 3861922 or 0276 974 904. Email: elimmills@yahoo.com.au

**Nelson** Regular meetings and visits held throughout the year to suit local members.  
Contact: Beth Conrad, C/- 5 Torlesse Street, Enner Glynn, Nelson 7011  
Ph. 0220 483 322. Email: bethconrad.nz@gmail.com

**Otago** Meetings held on the second Saturday of the month, except for recess in January and July. Acting Secretary Dr Robert Fisk, 13 Armadale St, Mosgiel 9024  
Ph: [03] 552 3825. Email: robertwfisk@gmail.com  
Website: www.groupspaces.com/otagoirisgroup

**South Canterbury** Meetings held on the first Wednesday of February to December.  
Secretary Lynda Crossen, 109 Cairds Road, Southburn, 2 RD, Timaru 7972  
Ph: [03] 686 4813. Email: crossen@xtra.co.nz

**Southland** Spontaneous meetings: Secretary Bev Lapham, PO Box 96, Mossburn 9747  
Ph. [03] 248 6373. Email: laphams11@kinect.co.nz



Photos of a few of Mary Barrell's glorious Pacific Coast iris seedlings (see pp. 12–14) viewed at national NZIS Conventions. (Photos by B and H. Pryor)

