

The Iris Standard

Newsletter of the
Ontario Iris Society

An affiliate of the
American Iris Society

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ONIS E-Membership Fees

1-year single: \$10 1-year family: \$15
3-year single: \$25 3-year family: \$40

Check the ONIS website for details,
[Ontario Iris Society \(google.com\)](http://Ontario Iris Society (google.com))

Visit the AIS WIKI

Use this link to access the American Iris
Society's Iris Encyclopedia,
[WebHome < Main < Iris Wiki \(irises.org\)](http://WebHome < Main < Iris Wiki (irises.org)).

*Find information about irises,
hybridizers, and different iris societies.*

Editor's Message

Someone sent me this cartoon many years ago, and I have never found it as relatable as I have this year. All three of our rhizome sales were very successful. The



number of participants in our July rhizome sale was about the same as last year but the orders were twice as large. Over 250 rhizomes were dug and shipped to eagerly awaiting iris lovers. At our August auction/sale at the TBG we offered iris rhizomes from Mid-America Garden. Their popularity was evident by the 'wee' breeze created

from fluttering bidding cards. And our 'pop-up' rhizome offer on Facebook completely sold out. Inquiries were still coming in two days after it was announced the sale was closed. Seems the world has gone iris-mad...but that shouldn't surprise this group of iris lovers!

This is the time of year when iris groups reflect on the events of the past season. Details of upcoming ONIS and AIS Region 2 meetings are found in the ONIS Matters section of this newsletter.

This edition's 'news bite' is an article on the development of the modern bearded iris...seems they originate from wildflowers! The botany lesson begins on page 3.

Enjoy!

Kate

President's Pointers

By Terry Laurin

We are enjoying the start of our reblooming iris season in Aurora. 'Precious Little Pink' started to rebloom on September 4th. Hopefully it will continue to bloom until the first frost. We are anxiously waiting for 'Lady Emma', another reliable rebloomer, to send up bloom stalks. Thanksgiving wouldn't be complete without having these two irises in bloom.



IB 'Precious Little Pink' (Byers, 1995)

Leaf Spot and Soft Rot

Due to the heavy rains in July and August, leaf spot was very prevalent on the foliage of our irises. To keep it under control I cut back any infected fans. The reason being that leaf spot is a fungus and spores will fall into the soil only to reinfect your iris leaves next season. Throw out foliage with your yard waste; do not compost.

Another problem caused by the heavy rains was soft rot. When cleaning up your iris clumps in preparation for winter, look for rhizomes that are soft to the touch. This is an indication that the rhizome has soft rot. If I find soft rhizomes, I will cut them back to where they are firm to the touch. Do this on a sunny day with no precipitation in the forecast for 24 hours. This gives the rhizomes time to callous over.

Not to be forgotten...the Iris Borer

Some of you may have noticed that your iris clumps are being dug up during the night. This is a telltale sign that you have the iris borer. Raccoons and skunks can hear borers feeding inside the rhizomes and will dig up a clump to get at, what they consider, a tasty treat.

If this has happened to you, dig up the affected clump. Discard any damaged rhizomes...you will see a tunnel through the rhizome...and replant three healthy rhizomes...this is the recommended number however I like to plant as many as five. Secure with a rock until the roots anchor the rhizome into the ground.



Of course, I continue to recommend a DynaTrap® as a way to control the borer moths in your garden.

If you have any questions about what I've covered here, or relating to iris, please feel free to email me at tlaurin@rogers.com.



Bearded Iris Species for the Garden

by Tom Waters

Taken from *The World of Irises*, the blog of the American Iris Society, September 5, 2022. Tom is also the president of the Dwarf Iris Society.

Most of us are quite familiar with the gorgeous hybrid bearded irises grown in so many gardens around the world. Whether dwarf, median, or tall bearded, these irises are the great showstoppers of the springtime iris parade. Every year, hybridizers introduce new varieties, so there is a never-ending stream of new colours, patterns, and flower forms.

But before hybridizers took an interest in irises - scarcely more than 100 years ago - bearded irises in gardens were much like irises in nature. Yes, bearded irises are wildflowers in Europe and western Asia, where numerous different species grow on hillsides or in valleys without gardeners to care for them.

These wild bearded irises are of interest to some iris growers, for a variety of reasons. Some of us are just attracted to wildflowers and like to see the plants as nature made them. Others are students of iris history, and it is these bearded species that are ancestral to our modern hybrids; growing them is like tracing the roots of our family tree. Others are hybridizers, curious to explore the untapped potential of these species.

Here is just a smattering of bearded iris species that may be of interest, with an emphasis on those that have been mentioned frequently in books and articles or that have featured prominently in the development of our modern bearded iris hybrids.



Iris pallida – a form with variegated foliage

Iris pallida is a European tall bearded (TB) species, with light blue-violet flowers and straight stems with branching clustered near the top. To my eye, it is the most stately of all the bearded iris species.

Iris variegata, another European species, is smaller, similar to miniature tall bearded (MTB) irises in size, with zig-zag stems and distinctively coloured flowers with yellow standards and falls marked in wine-red or brick-red.

These two species are probably the sole ancestors of the diploid tall bearded irises grown in gardens in the 1800s and early 1900s. They hybridize in nature, and these natural hybrids were collected by flower lovers and grown in



European gardens. Any modern TB iris that has yellow (or pink or orange) colouration owes its colour to *Iris variegata* (pictured left).

The other wild irises important in the development of the modern TBs were a range of different tetraploid plants from various locations in the eastern Mediterranean. These include *Iris cypriana*, *Iris trojana*, *Iris mesopotamica*, and some named clones such as 'Amas' and 'Ricardi'. All are purple bitones and large, well-branched plants. The botanical status of these is not as clear as might be, but every modern TB descends from them in some fashion. It was hybridizers of the early 20th century who crossed the colourful diploid *pallida/variegata* hybrids with these large tetraploids to create the modern tetraploid TBs that have become the most popular and widely grown of all irises.



Iris aphylla

Moving down in height, we come next to *Iris aphylla*, a species from eastern Europe that is usually similar to standard dwarf bearded (SDB) or intermediate bearded (IB) irises in height, but copiously branched, the lowest branch usually emerging right at ground level! The flowers are dark violet, and beards usually bluish. It has been used in two different ways in breeding modern bearded irises: first in breeding "black" TBs, and then later in the work of Ben Hager and others creating the tetraploid MTBs.

In the realm of dwarf species, the earliest known to western European gardeners was *Iris lutescens* (once called *Iris chamaeiris*), which is native to the warm Mediterranean areas of Spain, France, and Italy. It was the basis for our garden dwarf bearded irises until the 1950s. Its height varies, spanning the modern MDB and SDB classes and sometimes growing even a bit taller. Colours are yellows, violets, whites, and blended and bitoned versions of those colours.



Iris pumila seedlings

The most important dwarf species in the development of modern dwarf and median irises is the species *Iris pumila*, native to cooler, higher regions of eastern Europe. It is quite tiny, usually only about four inches tall, with blooms that appear almost stemless and spring straight from the rhizomes. It has an extensive colour range, from white to blue, purple, rosy, and yellow, usually with a darker spot of violet, red, or brown. It came to the attention of iris breeders in western Europe and the US rather late, in the mid-20th century. Once "discovered," however, it became a power player in iris breeding. *Iris pumila*, when crossed with TBs, produced the modern SDB class, and through them the modern MDBs and IBs as well.

Iris reichenbachii grows wild on the Balkan peninsula, where it exists in both diploid and tetraploid forms. The flowers are rather long in form, and most are either a dull yellow or a grayish violet. This species is notable in the history of iris breeding for introducing the

"dominant amoena" gene into the TB gene pool through the work of Paul Cook. Most modern bicolours have *I. reichenbachii* back somewhere in their family tree.



Iris reichenbachii

Also worthy of note is *Iris reichenbachii*'s diploid relation, *Iris suaveolens* (once called *Iris mellita*). It is smaller than *Iris reichenbachii*, but otherwise similar. It is noted for its sickle-shaped leaves, in some forms edged in a narrow line of red-violet pigment.

I hope this line-up of bearded species has piqued your interest. They are nice additions to the garden for anyone who is curious about where our garden iris "came from" or is attracted to the simple beauty of wildflower irises. One sometimes finds a few bearded species available from commercial iris growers, but more are consistently available through various seed exchanges from societies like the [Species Iris Group of North America](#), the [Scottish Rock Garden Club](#), the [British Iris Society](#), or the [Dwarf Iris Society](#). (A Canadian source is 'Wrightman Alpine Nursery', [Home | Wrightman Alpines Nursery - ed](#))

Why not "go wild" and try some bearded species (next) year!

Hybridizer's Corner

When I found myself with an empty column in the newsletter, Terry suggested some pictures of my favourite irises from 2023. After giving it some thought I realized I had some seedlings with which I was very happy.

So...for your viewing pleasure, here are two Siberian seedlings that bloomed this season.



The first is 'Berries And Cream' X bee. Of note is the clear blue colouring and the flared falls. As this is its first year to bloom, the colouring may change in its' second year.



This was a shocker! It grew out of a pile of seeds that wound up in the garden when a tray of potted seeds overturned. Of note is the soft yellow streak on the style arms. The parentage is unknown but certainly one to watch next year to see if the colouring is any different.



ONIS Matters In the Months Ahead

2023 ONIS Annual Meeting

Sunday, October 22 at 11:15 am ET

Join us for our first in-person meeting since 2019. We will review 2023 and discuss possible events for 2024. Afterwards, ONIS members who attend the meeting can enjoy a complimentary lunch. RSVP to Kate for details and restaurant location, (kbrewitt@rogers.com).

2023 AIS Region 2 Annual Board Meeting

Wednesday, October 11 at 7:00 pm ET

The Region 2 Board will discuss business matters in advance of the Oct 28th General Meeting. Everyone is welcome. (via zoom)

2023 AIS Region 2 Annual General Meeting

Saturday, October 28 at 12:00 pm ET

At this zoom meeting Committee Chairs will give their annual reports. Members will vote on Board nominations. At 1:30 pm there will be an AIS Webinar on *The Iris Family*, presented by Bob Pries, AIS Iris Encyclopaedia Manager.

All Region 2 members will receive a pre-registration email for the general meeting. If you are not an AIS member but would like to attend the meeting and/or the presentation, email Kate to receive pre-registration details, (kbrewitt@rogers.com).

Welcome New & Renewing Members!

- M. Burova – Etobicoke, ON
- C. Edwards – Mulmur, ON
- A. Langhammer – King City, ON
- C. MacDonald – Edwin, MB
- A. Park – Bowmanville, ON
- R. Raczkowski – Don Mills, ON
- C. Steacy – Napanee, ON

AIS Matters Upcoming Conventions



'New Horizons'

2024 AIS/Japanese National Convention
The Holiday Inn Portland-Columbia Riverfront
Portland, Oregon
June 25 to 29, 2024

Hosted by the Greater Portland Iris Society, join fellow iris lovers for a combined AIS National and Japanese Society Convention. During this four-day convention attendees will visit five host gardens as listed below. An optional tour to a Japanese garden is also being offered. There will be AIS section programs, a Geek dinner and the ever-popular silent auction and boutique.

Host Gardens

- Aitken's Salmon Creek Garden, Vancouver, WA
- Mt. Pleasant Iris Farm, Washougal, WA
- Mid-America Garden, Salem, OR
- Miller's Manor Gardens, Canby, OR
- Misty River Garden, Canby, OR

2024 Convention Co-Chairs

Contact: Chad Harris, chadharris@prodigy.net
or John Ludi, kludi@juno.com, for details.

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