

# The Iris Standard

Newsletter of the  
Ontario Iris Society

An affiliate of the  
American Iris Society

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## Editor's Message

As I started to put together this newsletter I found that there was very little 'iris news' to report. With most, if not all, events cancelled there were no convention pictures, flower show results, or even garden events to 'share' with fellow iris lovers. Then I started thinking about the pandemic and how it had allowed me to spend more time in the garden.

Unfortunately it was a dismal iris season for us in Aurora. Even though the season started on schedule with the bloom of 'Compact Buddy' on May 1<sup>st</sup>, it was another week before we saw our second bloom, 'Snuggles' on May 8<sup>th</sup>. In fact it was after the May long weekend before our iris season really got into full swing. Thank goodness we didn't have an open garden because only seven clumps of irises were in bloom at that time. Terry talks about our iris season in his 'President's Pointers'. Hopefully it will help explain some of the oddities you experienced in your own garden this year.

There were many lessons learned this spring, some life lessons others gardening lessons. But as gardeners we are always learning or, at least, having our memories refreshed by lessons previously learned but forgotten. That said, I found an interesting article on someone else's learning experiences. Hope you enjoy.

There has been a lot of interest in our Virtual Iris Show. To date over 50 entries have been submitted. The deadline is July 10<sup>th</sup> so there is still time to enter. It will be exciting to see who 'takes home' the prizes!

There has also been increased interest in our Facebook page. Check it out and help keep it interesting by posting your own pictures, thoughts and questions.

As always, stay safe and keep your social distance!     Kate



**The Ontario Iris Society has a  
Facebook page.**

*We hope you will 'like' us then...*

- upload your pictures,
- share your experiences

*It's the visitors to the page that  
make it a success!*



## ONIS Membership Fees

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

*Check the ONIS website for details*

<https://sites.google.com/site/ontarioirissociety>

## President's Pointers

by Terry Laurin

### 2020 In Review

The winter of 2019/2020 was particularly hard on our iris garden. Throughout we experienced multiple cycles of freezing and thawing. In mid-January there were torrential rains and, because frost was already in the ground, the water pooled on the surface. Our backyard was a veritable lake. On two occasions I had to dig drainage ditches to allow the standing water to drain from around the irises.

To add insult to injury, there was not much of a spring. As reported by the Weather Network, it was the coldest April in fifty-six years. On May 11<sup>th</sup> we had snow then two weeks later temperatures rose to over 30°C. As a result there were many challenges to deal with in the garden. Many of you may have experienced the same.

### Heaving Irises

As a result of the freeze/thaw cycles some of the newly planted irises (planted in early fall 2019) heaved out of the soil. This trend continued until the middle of May. During this time I found I was replanting the same irises numerous times. Despite these efforts some did not survive and were found lying on top of the soil in the spring, roots shrivelled and lifeless.

### Soft Rot

Because the ground was frozen when the January rains fell, many rhizomes sat in cold, standing water for a couple of days. As a result, when the warmer temperatures arrived some of our irises had soft rot which leaves the rhizome soft and spongy to the touch.

To deal with this I am going through our irises and cutting out the affected rhizomes. This is done when there is no forecast of rain for 48 hours so the new cuts can callous over.

### Reduced Flowering and Distorted Blooms

As a result of the April/May frosts, the irises developmental phase was interrupted so that when the irises started to bloom the flowers were shorter and they bloomed while still nestled in the foliage. Some of our reliable bloomers did not bloom at all.

While others that normally produced ten or twelve bloom stalks were only producing one or two.

The SDB 'Teagan' (D. Spoon, 2009) was a good example. Visitors to our Open Gardens will attest to the fact that this is a very floriferous SDB. This year only one bloom stalk developed and flowered. However, upon closer inspection I found evidence that the plant had tried to send up other bloom stalks. At the point on the rhizome where the stalk would normally form there were three leaves. The outside two were green while the middle leaf was yellow, evidence of a partially developed bloom stalk.



'Teagan' (D. Spoon, 2009)

Undeveloped bloom stalks were also seen in the taller irises. This was evidenced by a partially developed stalk with an empty spathe (the papery covering surrounding emerging buds) on the end.

It is good practise to remove these undeveloped bloom stalks. If left, they may rot and affect the health of the rhizome. Also at this time check for borer activity. By catching the borer in the leaves it reduces the chance of the borer eating its way into the rhizome.

Another problem was distorted blooms. In these instances the flower looked like it had been sprayed with 'Round-up'. This was most evident in the smaller irises (MDBs and SDBs) because of their earlier bloom time.

Both reduced flowering and distorted blooms are caused by unseasonal weather conditions which interrupts the natural cycle of the plant. Hopefully next year these issues will have resolved themselves.

## Location, Location, Location

By Bryce Williamson

Although I have been growing irises for over 55 years, I learn something new every iris season, or a lesson from the past is reinforced. In the last few years it is the term “location, location, location” and my discovery that it not only applies to real estate but also to gardening.



*'Lavender Moonbeams' (R. Tasco image)*

Two years ago, I decided to add three *I. unguicularis*, sometimes called the Algerian iris, to the garden, but my acquiring the plants coincided with my breaking six ribs and having to find a spot for the gardeners to plant them while I healed. The location was not ideal—my first lesson was that I should have found a location where I walk every day, not in a bed where I can go days without looking at the plants. The second thing I learned, and it is a recommendation for other gardeners who might like to grow these winter flowering irises, was find 'Lavender Moonbeams' because it flowered well.

Last year I made the decision to move the irises from the backyard into the front yard. No irises have grown there in seven or eight years and I expected them to do well in this new location. I had learned my lesson from the past and fertilized more heavily and add organic matter to the soil. That we did by moving 7 yards of potting soil mix into an area 600 square feet and a fifty pound bag of 15-15-15 was also spread over the area; however, I tend to over plant and as a result, I ran out of room and needed to plant my arilbreds in a different bed by the walk.

I had Reynaldo hand dig the bed with a bag of potting soil, but as the arilbreds grew and then bloomed, they bloomed poorly. My lesson was that they needed more fertilizer and one bag of potting soil for even that small area was not enough. I've also learned that my tendency to want to replant four rhizomes of a variety needs to be curbed—I may have to settle for three rhizomes! I will have to watch myself or the 1200 square foot area we are preparing in the backyard will not be enough.

I have always thought that where I bought plants and bulbs determined the quality of the product. A couple of years ago, I decided to add some reticulata to the garden and, for once, I got the location right—along the front of the sidewalk where I walk at least six times a day. I picked up a cheap bag of *Iris reticulata* 'Harmony' from Costco and went to the most expensive and best of Silicon Valley's remaining nurseries—the dwindling number of plant nurseries here is another story—for other colors and into the ground they went. I'm on the second year and 'Harmony' has bloomed well, though I learned that I should have planted the bulbs more closely together, and it is thriving, but the more expensive plants have grown and only thrown up a couple of flowers. There does not seem to be a tight connection between price and quality of the bulbs.



Sometimes I get the location right by mistake. Every few years, I scrounge the nurseries for Dutch iris, buying a dozen of each variety that I can find. They do well the first years, but fail to naturalize for a variety of reason. The amazing exception is 'Sky Wing', a soft lavender-blue that loves its location and flowers every year. It is planted at the edge of the

water line for the sprinkler and I thought that location would be a kiss of death, but it likes it there. A large rock anchors that corner of the rose bed and that may help with Sky Wing. (Note that there is a Siberian called Sky Wings too).

With more than fifty springs under my belt for growing irises, each year I learn something new.

In keeping with the essence of this article, here are...

### Lessons Learned in 2020

by Kate Brewitt

Because our garden is a Display Garden for three different iris societies we must maintain garden maps that outline where different iris cultivars reside. I learned a lot about the importance of good maps and good mapping skills this year.

#### **1. Garden maps are invaluable.**

This is especially true for Ontario as garden tags have a tendency to pop out of the ground during the winter. Maps help ID that iris that you forgot you moved or that old iris that you forgot you had!

#### **2. Don't locate irises to dig and divide using your memory.**

Someone at last year's Auction and Sale ended up with an iris I had newly acquired in 2018. When I planted it I thought I would remember its placement however I was dead wrong. You can imagine my disappointment when something else bloomed in its supposed place. That said, if you purchased a rhizome labelled 'Sugar Blues' last year and it looked like this picture when it bloomed then you got yourself a good deal!



*'Matrix' (Earl Hall by Lloyd Zurbrigg, 1991)*

Of course from this lesson comes, don't dig and divide using an old garden map. I suggest if you keep your old maps that you date them.

#### **3. Murphy's Law: you will need your old garden maps only AFTER you have thrown them away.**

An iris bloomed this year that I thought we had 'purged' many years ago. After looking at dozens of pictures taken in previous years I finally remembered it would be on an old garden map. I then remembered that we threw these out earlier this year when we found ourselves in a self-isolation cleaning frenzy.

From this lesson comes...

#### **4. Realize you have never completely purged an iris from your garden.**

We had relegated an iris to 'the back forty' last year because we wanted something showier in our front lawn bed. The 'back forty' is that part of our garden relegated for seedlings, vegetables and plants we don't have room for in the other beds. Anyway, the transplanted rhizomes got soft rot and died. I shrugged it off...it wasn't meant to be. Then in early June the iris reappeared in the front bed. I guess the rhizome hadn't been fully removed. In the meantime, I have changed my opinion of this iris and it will stay exactly where it is in the front bed.

#### **5. Move your irises if they don't perform.**

Terry and I reconfigured the club's Dykes Memorial Medal collection two years ago. This year many of the award-winners that had never bloomed before put on a beautiful display. This kind of made up for the poor median iris display.

Finally, a lesson from the animal world.

#### **6. Squirrels and chipmunks do not know how to self-isolate.**

We had dozens of holes in our garden this year thanks to these industrious critters. One evening I even had a chipmunk jump up on my shoe, look at me and skitter away. I swear I heard him chuckling as he went on his merry way.

Whether you use garden maps or not I hope you enjoyed your garden as much as I did mine this year!



## In the Months Ahead

### ONIS Matters

#### **ONIS Annual Iris Rhizome Auction and Sale August 9 – Toronto Botanical Garden**

To ensure the health and safety of our members and guests the ONIS Board has decided to cancel this popular Auction and Sale due to COVID-19. Instead the Board is planning an on-line sale. Once the details are finalized, members will be advised.

#### **AIS Region 2 Annual Meeting**

The AIS Region 2 Board is reviewing its options for this year's annual meeting. Details will be communicated to members when they become available.

#### **ONIS Annual Meeting October/November – Port Perry, ON**

The ONIS Board is reviewing its options for this year's meeting. Details to be announced.

### Welcome New and Renewing ONIS Members!

- M. Castleton – Cobourg, ON
- A. Karpinsky – Kelowna, BC
- A. MacFayden – Brampton, ON
- J. & A. Misson & family – Courtice, ON
- D. McQueen – London, ON

### Reminder to All AIS Judges

Due to COVID-19 this year's AIS award voting has been canceled. No judges will be dropped for failing to vote their ballot, or for failing to get needed JT.

1. **August 8** – Region 2 Judges' Training Activity reports must be submitted to Wendy Roller our Region 2 JT Chair. Printable copies of the report can be found on the Region 2 website. If you need assistance, please email Wendy at [gwr67@frontier.com](mailto:gwr67@frontier.com).

## Join the American Iris Society



Annual Single: \$30US / Dual: \$35US  
 Triennial Single: \$70US / Dual: \$85US  
 (Includes a quarterly bulletin)

A one-year electronic membership, or e-membership, is also available for \$15US.

To view a list of additional membership types, visit the American Iris Society website ([www.irises.org](http://www.irises.org)).

## IRIS FIX



Don McQueen's 'IRIS FIX' began in 2004 as a daily (usually) e-mail with an iris photograph from his patch (containing historic and newbies) in London, Ontario.

The daily FIX begins with bloom season in late April to early May and continues into the late summer or early fall. It is then sent weekly during the winter months. The name of the iris and the date of the photograph are always in the title of the digital image.

If you would like to be put on the 'IRIS FIX list', e-mail Don at [ddmcqueen@rogers.com](mailto:ddmcqueen@rogers.com).

If and when you have had enough doses, all you need do is send Don an e-mail saying "Thanks but no thanks", and he will remove you from the e-list.

Indulge yourself! Don takes a beautiful photograph that will make you smile!

*The Iris Standard* is published four (4) times a year; Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn. Materials submitted must be received by December 1<sup>st</sup> (Winter), March 1<sup>st</sup> (Spring), June 1<sup>st</sup> (Summer) and September 1<sup>st</sup> (Autumn). Submissions may be edited for style and clarity. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited without written permission from the editor, [oniseditor@gmail.com](mailto:oniseditor@gmail.com). Title page: 'Ginger Twist' (Schafer/Sacks, 2009) taken at Aurora Borealis Iris Garden, Aurora, ON. Photo: K. Brewitt, Editor.