

# The Iris Standard

## Newsletter of the Ontario Iris Society

An affiliate of the  
American Iris Society

Volume 16 Issue 1 – Winter 2021

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The Ontario Iris Society has a  
Facebook page.

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

- upload your pictures,
- share your experiences
- ask questions.

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/view/ontarioiris>

### Visit the AIS WIKI

The IRIS ENCYCLOPEDIA of the American  
Iris Society, <http://wiki.irises.org/bin/view>  
Find information about irises, hybridizers,  
and different iris societies.

### Editor's Message

Happy New Year! Hope you all had a happy, and safe, holiday season. It will certainly be one for the history books! However, we have much to be grateful for as we enter a new year, one that looks as if it will be full of promise!



TB 'Rosy Forecast' (Williamson, 2010)

In this edition's *President's Pointers* Terry reviews 2020 and what it meant for ONIS. He also provides some insight into the year ahead. And, thinking that some of us will all be looking for something to do during January's lockdown, Terry also offers a selection of iris-themed activities. Everything from reading to jigsaw puzzles. Explore! You never know what you might find.

As we say goodbye, and good riddance, to 2020 I thought an article on 'iris myths' would be appropriate. The past year has been riddled with terms like 'fake news' and 'alternative facts'. Let's start 2021 by setting the record straight on some of the iris myths that seem to pop up every now and again. And if you see a turquoise iris with pink beards on the Internet, think Photoshop! These still do not exist.

Best wishes for the year ahead. Remember, *reticulatas* start to bloom in March...which is only three months away!! Kate

## President's Pointers

By Terry Laurin



Due to the creative thinking of the Board, ONIS was able to reinvent itself and adapt its activities to suit a virtual world. As a result, we were able to connect with members in other areas of the province...and across Canada.

When the TBG closed, rather than cancel our flower show we took a page from the American Iris Society and held a virtual iris show. All members and iris-loving non-members were invited to participate. Everyone was awarded a prize for their efforts. We learned a lot from our first attempt at this and will be making some adjustments to our next virtual show planned for May to July 2021. Watch for the show schedule in the next newsletter.

By August, we found ourselves in the same position for our Auction and Sale. The Board looked at several possibilities including a 'zoom' auction but in the end decided to offer irises from the President's garden. Again, we learned a lot and hopefully we will be able to apply those lessons to the 2021 On-line Rhizome Sale.

### ONIS Annual Meeting

The ONIS Board had an email exchange to review the events of 2020 and work on a plan for 2021. The Board has decided not to attend any in-person events due to COVID-19 concerns. Some events are working on modifying their format to a virtual platform. Check out 'In the Months Ahead' in this newsletter for details. Also, updates will be posted on our Facebook page as we are notified by event organizers.

### 2020 AIS Region 2 Meeting

Last year's AIS Region 2 annual meeting was held via zoom. After months of practise runs it came off

without a hitch. Kathryn Mohr of the Capital-Hudson Iris Society continues in her position as AIS Region 2 Regional Vice President (RVP) while Neil Houghton of the Greater Rochester Iris Society is our new assistant RVP. Kate Brewitt of the Ontario Iris Society returns as Secretary while Vaughn Sayles continues as Treasurer.

Following the meeting there was a Judges' Training session hosted by renowned Siberian iris hybridizer, Robert Hollingworth. Interested participants from across Canada, the US and even Australia took part the zoom session. If you are interested in viewing this presentation it can be found on You Tube: <https://youtu.be/U8CDIMdtX0o>

### Dealing with the Lockdown

Since Ontario is in lock-down until January 23, 2021, I thought you might be interested in the following activities provided by the American Iris Society (AIS).

#### Announcing the AIS YouTube Channel

Looking for something to do? The AIS YouTube Channel contains many of the webinars presented during this past summer as well as other iris videos. While you are there, be sure to 'Subscribe' then click on the bell next to the Subscribe Button to be notified when a new video is uploaded.

#### Looking to do Some Research?

Visit the American Iris Society Iris Encyclopedia (a.k.a. AIS Wiki). It is a great resource for information on irises: <http://wiki.irises.org>.

#### Looking for Something to Read?



The AIS Hager/DuBois Memorial Online Iris Library is found on the AIS Wiki. This is an ever-growing collection of iris publications and videos. Learn about hybridizers, view articles and books and

browse old catalogues. Watch videos from *The Iris Video Library* and much, much more!

### Looking for a Jigsaw Puzzle?

Yup! A daily puzzle can be found on the WIKI, too.  
<http://wiki.irises.org/Main/InfoDailyIrisPuzzle>.

Otherwise, there are plenty of hybridizer and iris grower websites, Facebook groups, and other social media sites to explore.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at [tlaurin@rogers.com](mailto:tlaurin@rogers.com)

## Three Myths About Bearded Irises

by Tom Waters,

from the *WORLD OF IRISES*, blog of the AIS.

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

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

### **Myth #1**

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

Although, as I shall explain in a bit, there are some good reasons for planting irises with the tops of the rhizomes exposed, it is not necessary to do so to ensure bloom. Irises bloom just fine if planted with an inch or more of soil over the rhizome. Nothing magical happens when sunlight strikes the surface of an exposed rhizome.



Left: this rhizome is planted at the correct depth.

Right: ...and so is this one.

Where did this myth come from? I think it has three sources. The first is a basic piece of advice: iris rhizomes are not bulbs. Most spring-flowering bulbs (daffodils, tulips, crocuses, etc.) need to be planted fairly deep (three times their height is a common recommendation). If you plant an iris as deep as a tulip, it may indeed not bloom. In fact it may not survive at all. The second is a general remark about growing conditions irises prefer: they like full sun, or at least half a day of sun, and will not bloom well in too much shade. Finally, there is a bit of traditional advice that irises should be planted "like a duck in the water", with the top half of the rhizome above the soil surface. I think these last two points (a recommendation for planting with exposed rhizomes and the fact that irises bloom best in sunny locations) led people to blend these two ideas together and conclude that it is sunlight striking the tops of the rhizomes that causes irises to bloom. The advice not to plant them deep like tulips or daffodils then reinforces this notion.

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

The short answer is that it just doesn't matter very much. In most gardens, irises with the rhizomes exposed and irises covered with a half inch or inch of soil will both do equally well. If you look at an established clump, you will see that the rhizomes themselves sometimes grow down into the soil and sometimes grow up onto the surface. It's all good.

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

In areas with very cold winters, Irises may benefit from being planted more deeply, making them less susceptible to heaving during freeze-thaw cycles. In dry, hot regions (such as much of the western US), planting with the rhizomes covered offers some protection against sun-scalding and desiccation from heat and wind. The rhizomes appreciate being below the soil surface, where conditions are a little cooler and moister.

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

### **Myth #2**

#### **Irises can "revert" to some other colour**

It seems like everyone has heard a story of a beautiful clump of irises, say nice, ruffled pinks, "reverting" to white or purple after a few years. In fact, this does not happen. Irises do not spontaneously change colour. (There is one minor qualification to this statement, which I will address below.)



*No, this iris will never "revert to purple"*

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

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

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

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

The first is hybridization. Just as your morning glories may reseed themselves, so a bearded iris may occasionally form a seed pod and drop its seeds into the soil around the plant. If these seeds sprout, the seedlings may well be a different colour

than the parent, and when they bloom (perhaps three years after the seeds are first produced), the gardener may be in for a surprise! To prevent this from happening, you can remove the bloom stalks after the flowers fade, so that seed pods do not develop.

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

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

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

### **Myth #3**

#### **Iris foliage should be trimmed back in the fall**

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

are now deprived of much of their food source: photosynthesis in green leaves.

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

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

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

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

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



Left: The clump was left undisturbed and trimmed.  
Right: These were dug, divided, trimmed, and replanted.

#### About the Author:

Tom Waters lives in Cuyamungue, New Mexico. He is presently serving as the vice president of the Aril Society International, and President of the Dwarf Iris Society of America. Tom Waters' website, *Telperion Oasis*, is devoted to the theory and practice of hybridizing bearded and arillate irises.

## Remembering Sandy Ives

By Kate Brewitt



The iris world lost a dedicated and passionate iris lover when Sandy Ives passed away on October 13, 2020.

Terry and I first got to know Sandy in 2003 at the first iris convention we attended...during another pandemic! That year the Canadian Iris Society (CIS) hosted the Siberian/Species Iris Convention in Hamilton, ON during the SARS outbreak. Sandy graciously introduced us to many fellow iris lovers who would become shared 'iris' friends.

Sandy wore many 'iris' hats over the years. He organized the Ottawa River Regional Iris Society (ORrIS), a regional group of the CIS. He was Regional Vice President for Region 16 of the American Iris Society (AIS) when Canada, in its entirety, was an AIS Region. He would later become the Regional Judges' Training Chair for Region 16. He, himself, achieved the status of AIS Master Judge (15 years of active judging service). He judged many of our flower shows and provided our judges with hours of judges' training. He was instrumental in getting me and Terry interested in becoming iris judges.

In 2008 the CIS awarded Sandy with the Walker Ross Service Award for outstanding work and dedication to promoting the genus iris through his many endeavors.

Our condolences to his wife Maureen, his daughter Emily, and his son Roger.



## In the Months Ahead

**All events are subject to COVID-19 restrictions in place at the time. Contact event organizers for details.**



**Get the Jump on Spring and Seedy Saturday  
Toronto Botanical Garden  
777 Lawrence Ave. E., Toronto.**

At the time of publication it is unknown if the Toronto Botanical Garden (TBG) will be holding this popular event in 2021. Regardless, the ONIS Board has decided not to attend due to COVID-19 concerns. Hopefully, we will return in 2022!

For up-to-date information, visit the TBG website, <https://torontobotanicalgarden.ca>.



**Innisfil Seedy Saturday – Virtual Event  
SAVE THE DATE: Saturday, March 27, 2021**

There will be a new format for 2021. Though the event will look different, the goals are to connect people with regional seed sellers and related groups and businesses, and to inspire through virtual learning opportunities.



Looking for a Seedy Saturday close to home, virtual or otherwise? Check the Seeds of Diversity website for up-to-date information on 2021 Seedy Saturdays & Sundays <https://www.seeds.ca/events>

## It's a Virtual Life for Me!

**May to July** – Get your cameras ready! ONIS will have another Virtual Flower Show in 2021. Watch the next edition of *The Iris Standard* for details on how to enter including the show schedule.

**July/August** – Due to the success of last year's On-line Rhizome sale, ONIS is planning to hold it again in 2021. The Board is currently looking at sources for iris rhizomes. If you have any suggestions, please email the editor: [oniseditor@gmail.com](mailto:oniseditor@gmail.com).

## ONIS In Brief

All dates indicated here are tentative, subject to existing restrictions that may be in place due to COVID-19. Watch for details in future editions of *The Iris Standard* or on Facebook.

**June 6** – ONIS Annual Iris Show at the TBG.

**August 8** – ONIS Annual Iris Rhizome Auction and Sale at the TBG.

## Join the American Iris Society (AIS)



Annual Single: \$30 US / Dual: \$35 US

Triennial Single: \$70 US / Dual: \$85 US

(Includes a quarterly bulletin)

A one (1) year electronic membership, or e-membership, is also available for \$15 US.

Go to the AIS website ([www.irises.org](http://www.irises.org)) for details and a list of additional membership types.

Upcoming Conventions

**The American Iris Society (AIS)  
National Convention  
'Iris Enchantment'  
Las Cruces, New Mexico  
April 11- 16, 2022**

Please note that the 2021 AIS National Convention scheduled to be held in Las Cruces, New Mexico has been **postponed to 2022** due to the Covid-19 pandemic. More information, such as dates, and what programs the AIS will present instead of the Convention will be made available soon. Thank you for your understanding.



"Rerun in 2021"  
Median Iris Convention

**APRIL 22 -24, 2020  
Oklahoma City, OK**

On April 22 - 24, 2021, the Oklahoma Iris Society and the Median Iris Society will be hosting the "Rerun in 2021" Median Iris Convention in Oklahoma City, OK. The convention headquarters will be the Embassy Suites, 3233 Northwest Expressway, Oklahoma City, OK.

Full registration includes Thursday Welcome Dinner, Friday night auction, Saturday Awards Banquet, convention book and a two-day five garden tour with lunches, and judges training. Deadline for the discounted registration is March 21, 2021. Visit the convention website for details: <https://2021medians.weebly.com>.

ONIS Matters**Your 2020/2021 ONIS Board**

Your Board for the upcoming year is as follows, Terry Laurin, President, Jinny Missons, VP, Lyn Hickey, Treasurer, Kate Brewitt, Secretary.

If you have any questions about ONIS email the ONIS Board at [just1moreiris@gmail.com](mailto:just1moreiris@gmail.com).

**ONTARIO IRIS SOCIETY (ONIS)  
INCOME AND EXPENSE STATEMENT  
OCTOBER 1, 2019 TO SEPTEMBER 30, 2020**

ASSETS

Bank Balance 01Oct2019	\$ 2,851.84	
Petty Cash 01Oct2019	\$ 45.95	
TD Canada Trust GIC	\$ 5,434.31	
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>		<b>\$8,332.10</b>

INCOME

Memberships	\$ 315.00	
Plant/Seeds Sales	\$ 1049.25	
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>		<b>\$1,364.25</b>

EXPENSES

AIS Insurance (\$30 US)	(\$ 40.00)	
TBG Horticulture Fee	(\$ 250.00)	
Rental Fees	(\$ 310.24)	
Supplies/Postage	(\$ 604.67)	
2019 Annual Meeting	(\$ 113.18)	
Virtual Show Prizes	(\$ 40.00)	
Banking Fees	(\$ 28.40)	
Stipend Reimbursements	(\$ 225.00)	
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>		<b>(\$1,611.49)</b>

**Annual Profit/Loss****(\$ 247.24)**

Bank Balance 30Sept2020	\$ 2,611.05	
Petty Cash 30Sept2020	\$ 39.50	
TD Cda Trust GIC (mat. 2Nov2020)	\$ 1,072.60	
TD Cda Trust GIC (mat. 4Apr2021)	\$ 4,361.71	
<b>Total Assets 30Sept2020</b>		<b>\$ 8,084.86</b>

*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: 'I. versicolor' Photo: D. McQueen.