

# 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 \(google.com\)](#)

#### Visit the AIS WIKI

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

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

#### Editor's Message

HAPPY 2024! Hope you all had an enjoyable holiday season! Some snow would have been nice, but Mother Nature always has her own ideas!

My continuing experiments with forcing *reticulata* bulbs in pots with other spring bulbs (see spring 2023 edition for details) has been stalled due to supply issues at my local garden centre. Not one to 'throw in the towel' I found myself a different winter project...germinating *crocasmia* seeds. When I learned this plant was part of the iris family, I was intrigued. Then, when I found a plant growing in a community garden where I volunteer (see right), I was determined to have it for my own garden. Unable to find it at several of my local nurseries, I went back to the community garden in October, and harvested some seeds. Having read up on what to do, my fingers are crossed!



***Crocosmia plant in bud.***

We have a guest contributor this edition. 'Making Your Garden Sing' was submitted by Grahame Ware who lives on Gabriola Island. Thanks to today's technology, he has been participating in our online sale. He felt this article was a way of giving back...a touching gesture indeed!

Finally, in ONIS Matters you will find details on 'Get the Jump on Spring'. We have decided it's time to return to this winter garden event. Hope to see you there! Kate

## President's Pointers

By Terry Laurin

Happy New Year! Sadly, the outlook for the 2024 winter is looking grim due to the super El Niño and global warming. Temperatures are predicted to be above average with near-normal precipitation levels. This means there will be many freeze-thaw cycles in Ontario increasing the chances that recently planted rhizomes will heave out of the soil. *(At 7°C on Christmas Day, Terry enjoyed a day in the garden! – ed)*

What can you do? Watch your irises throughout the winter. If rhizomes heave, replant them by pressing them into the ground or covering the exposed roots with soil. This means you may want to keep a container of potting soil handy.

ONIS has been planning events for the upcoming year. In addition to returning to 'Get the Jump on Spring' at the TBG, we are hoping to have a flower show in June, also at the TBG. Details for 'Jump' (as we affectionately call it) are in this edition while details for June's show will be published in our spring edition.

Looking for something to do this winter? Seedy Saturdays are organized in cities and towns around the province. They are the 'go to' event for anyone interested in backyard gardening, growing food, establishing pollinator gardens, and more! Check their website for information about 2024 Seedy Saturdays and Sundays in your neighbourhood, [Seedy Saturdays and Events – Seeds of Diversity](#).



### Report from the 2023 AIS Region 2 Annual General Meeting

The 2023 AIS Region 2 annual meeting was held via zoom on October 28th. Cara Hutchings, of the Greater Rochester Iris Society (GRIS),

has agreed to return for another term as Regional Vice President (RVP). Annette Kuhn, of the Western New York Iris Society (WNYIS), will continue as Treasurer, and Ben Morris will stay on as secretary. The position of Assistant RVP will remain open. If you are interested in this position, let me know.

After the meeting Bob Pries, AIS Iris Encyclopedia manager gave a presentation entitled "A Romp Through the Iris Family". It was interesting to find out just how large this family is, even without the bearded classes. It was well researched with lots of great pictures. If you were unable to join us, here's a link to the AIS YouTube page [Webinar #36 "A Romp Through the Iris Family" by Bob Pries - YouTube](#).



Just a reminder, Region 2 has monthly zoom meetings on the second Wednesday of each month. Our first meeting of 2024 will be on Wednesday, January 10 at 7:00 pm ET. If you would like to join us, let me know and I'll send you the meeting pre-registration email.

As always, feel free to email me with questions about your irises, [tlaurin@rogers.com](mailto:tlaurin@rogers.com).



## Making Your Garden Sing: Standard Dwarf Bearded Iris



By Grahame Ware (Text & Photos ©)

Above, 'Iris' by John Atkinson Grimshaw 1886

Iris is named after the Greek Goddess of Rainbows. She was a messenger and carrier of good news and good vibes and a daughter of the sea goddess Electra. Ahhh, those old, polytheistic cultures that apparently our western civilization is based on. Such fun back in the day and, if truth be told, it makes more sense to me.

But it's not just the colours and combinations of the genus *Iris* that are astonishing and worth noting. With *Iris*, there is such an ecological diversity as well. There are *Iris* that flourish in hot, steppe conditions and others that revel in watery situations. And, with that ecological diversity comes adaptive response and variations in size, habit, and functions. There are irises that reach 4' in clay loam and others 4" in grit and gravel. Due to this physiological and edaphic flexibility, they are an invaluable staple of the home gardener. For a vibrant new element in your gardens, you should investigate the clan known as the standard dwarf bearded (SDB) *Iris*, if you haven't done so already. These are not your Grannie's 'flags'. I'm convinced these not-so-dwarf but shorter fellows will dazzle you both in beauty and function. What defines SDB is *Iris* that get no taller than 16". This doesn't mean, however, that their flowers are necessarily smaller by proportion. In fact,

many of the flowers on some of the award-winning varieties are larger than their taller and more common cousins.

Besides being a perfect component for the smaller garden, the amount of choice and colour is stunning. These guys can do it all. And, given time and space (and grown well of course), they will put on a display that you'll look forward to year after year. What's better perhaps is that they'll do it without a lot of maintenance. After all, they're *Iris* and like the ancient Greek goddess, they'll bring a spectrum of beautiful colours to your garden in the spring.

### **A Brief History of the Standard Dwarf Bearded Iris**

I've adapted the following from [The American Iris Society website](#). They say, "Standard Dwarf Bearded are some of the most useful garden plants, ranging in height from 20 cm (8 inches) to 41 cm (16 inches). They flower after the Miniature Dwarf Bearded (MDB, 4"-8") iris. SDBs are best displayed in clumps where they give the effect of a "cushion" of blooms. The colours are nearly unlimited since the SDBs show all the different "spot patterns" of the miniatures, as well as the plicatas and pinks seen in the Tall Bearded (TBs). The best of them competes for the top award for the SDBs, the Cook-Douglas Medal."

And to add to that succinct summary, here are some well-articulated comments [from the January 27, 2020 blog](#) of the American Iris Society (AIS).

"The 1960s and 1970s were perhaps the most exciting time in the history of dwarf iris development. Although the SDBs themselves were deemed too large to be considered true dwarfs, they had an enormous impact on breeding. Dwarf enthusiasts crossed the SDBs back to *I. pumila*, producing many charming hybrids, earlier blooming than the SDBs and quite distinctive in appearance, with ¾ of their

genes coming from the dainty *I. pumila*. This became the standard cross to produce Miniature Dwarf Bearded (MDBs). The class was rounded out by selections (many of them botanical ecotypes - GW) of pure *pumila* ancestry, as well as hybrids from SDB breeding whose offspring turned out to be short enough to fit the definition and classification standards of the AIS MDB class. These “runt SDBs” did not always meet with the approval of the dwarf purists, although they produced and represented a growing number of fine irises in this category. Indeed, in recent decades these MDBs from pure SDB breeding have come to quite dominate the class, in terms of sheer numbers as well as awards.”

There’s small and then there’s smaller! I’ve found their even shorter brethren, the MDBs, to be good subjects for pots because if not planted in the right spots or context in the open garden they can, quite simply, get lost.

I’ve had many dwarf bearded iris over the years from ‘Alpine Lake’ to ‘Yellow Canary’ but with moving and misfortune (or both!), I had to start over my SDB collection for my 70’s garden here on Gabriola island, BC. (This reference has nothing to do with that decade— no Disco Daisies— but rather my age when I created it!) To build up my stock and to make it contemporary and state of the art, I turned to the Ontario Iris Society’s (ONIS) fund-raising rhizome sale as a source of quality, variety, and value (more below). And, what a good idea that turned out to be!

### Some choice SDB’s in my garden

#### ‘Fruit Cup’

Large, sun-proof flowers, good bud count with four flowers in the first season. Early and very attractive with a tasty mandala pattern.

Iris Wiki says, ‘Fruit Cup’ (Paul Black, R. 2013) ‘Seedling R276A. SDB, 14” (36 cm), Midseason

to late bloom” (but early here on Gabriola).



Description continues: “Standards light buff-peach, lilac haze over center, narrow buff band; style arms mid buff-peach, pink midrib, pale rose center; falls pale buff-peach patch around beards, veined mid plum transitioning to mottled plum band, outer 1/3 washed light lilac, tan-peach rim; beards mid orange; pronounced sweet fragrance.” Now that’s detail, isn’t it?

#### ‘Oh Canada’

It has very striking colour contrasts and good size flowers that stayed well in our record heat mid-May weather in 2023. I grew it in a #2 pot in an exposed position and it did very well. It certainly is vigorous and appealing in its colours and style. It has a stoutness to it that is appealing in a small iris. This just in— ‘Oh Canada’ just won the top award for the SDBs (Cook-Douglas Medal) for 2023. Lucky me!



The ‘skinny’ on this iris from the AIS Iris Encyclopedia (Iris Wiki) reads as follows,

“13 in. Early bloom. Standards and style arms light blue; falls blue wash, central maroon spot with white rays radiating from beard; beards yellow in throat, ends blue with white tips; slight fragrance.”

### ‘Portland Pink’

This really is a great one with long-lasting flowers that emerge more peachy than pink but they ‘pink up’ over the ensuing days as they age. The shades of peach and pink are ephemeral and alluring. It’s a wonderful gift each day to see this cultivar morph. It flowered later than Fruit Cup but like that one, it is also sun-proof. However, and I’m merely quibbling here, mine reached 18” in the open garden and over 16” in a #2 pot. But alas, again, with something this marvelous though, I can cut some vertical criteria-breaking slack ‘til the cows come home.



Iris Wiki says this about ‘Portland Pink’, “(Paul Black, R. 2015) SDB, 15”, Late to very late bloom. Standards mid pink; style arms mid-dark pink; falls mid peach-pink, darker haft and line from beard to way down petal, green-tan textured veins; beards dark tangerine-pink; slight spicy fragrance. HM 2017; AM 2019; Cook-Douglas Medal 2021.”

The hybridizer, Paul Black says in his Mid-America Garden catalog, 2015, “Portland Pink was tagged for introduction from its maiden bloom. Saying it is unique is a vast understatement. *It is the best formed of all the pink SDBs* (my emphasis). Its one flaw is that some flowers have a fourth standard. Even more amazing, ‘Portland Pink’ is fertile. It can be picky about its partner but can have anywhere from a few to normal numbers of seed and they germinate.”

I snagged two ‘Portland Pink’ plants from the 2022 ONIS sale and they were anything but late flowering. In fact, they flowered just slightly later than the others. I did hand pollinate both ‘Portland Pink’ and ‘Fruit Cup’ and now thankfully, I have a couple of nice seed pods to start off a group of seedlings that may produce something worthwhile.

### ‘Radiate’

This one has a very nice plicated patterns and style. It increased well and seems to be free of



foliage diseases. Also, it held up well during the heatwave.

### General comments

A record-breaking heatwave hit here in mid-May. This underlined the importance of flowers that were sun-proof. This ability is due to a phenomenon known as “diamond dusting”

(visible on 'Radiate'- ed). This occurs when flowers have structures that produce a glitter-like quality on the surface of the petals. When the sparkles appear white, it is referred to as diamond dusting. They help to protect the petals from overheating and "frying". Many varieties do not have this wonderful glitter that doubles as protection. Many other species have this too, most notably Hemerocallis.

Thus, the simple double fan rhizomes that I received flowered very well with 'Fruit Cup', 'Oh Canada' and 'Portland Pink' excelling. 'Portland Pink' was the best in this regard, but it may have something to do with the May 2023 heatwave mellowing as 'Portland Pink' were out just a little later than the other two cultivars when more average temperatures returned. Right now, I have but one 'Portland Pink' in the ground with the other in a 2-gallon pot.

I was delighted at the performance of the 2021 and 2022 selections that I made with the ONIS Rhizome Sale. Thanks to everyone connected with this terrific fundraiser of the Ontario Iris Society (ONIS) especially their coordinator in this fantastic venture, Kate Brewitt.

It happens at the end of July or thereabouts. You can't lose with this sale and, more importantly, you'll also be supporting a strong Canadian grassroots horticultural organization.

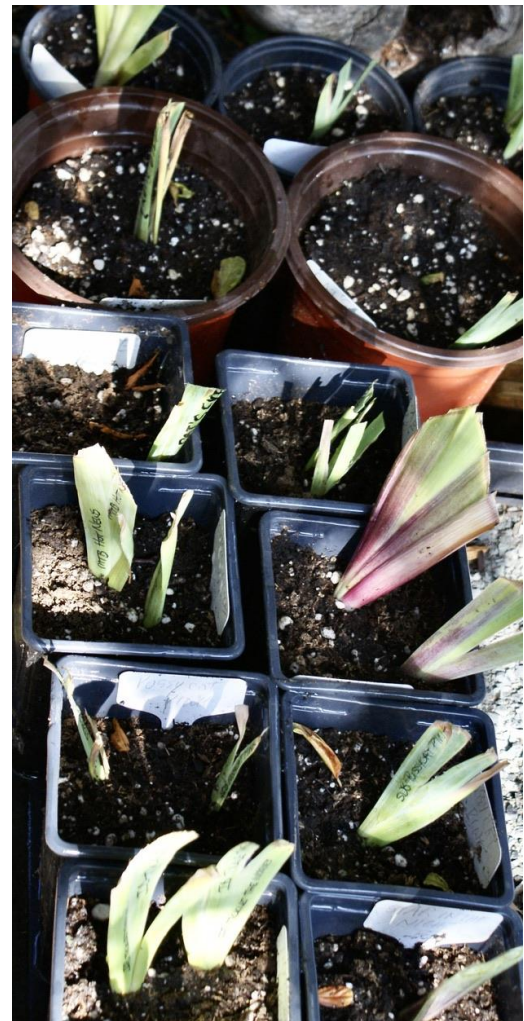
(Details for the 2024 sale will be posted on the ONIS website, [Ontario Iris Society \(google.com\)](http://OntarioIrisSociety.google.com) – ed)

In summary, I have grown many of the smaller species *Iris* over the years (and continue to do so) including *I reichenbachii*, *I tenax*, *I graminea*, *I douglasii*, *I aphylla*, *I setosa*, *I pumila*, *I clarkei* & *I suaveolens*. However, the SDBs have so much garden merit that they are the perfect component for my 70's garden.



Above: ONIS iris order after shipping - rehydrating in shallow water before potting up.

Below: ONIS iris order potted up in 6" deep pots and liquid fertilized before planting out.





## ONIS Matters In the Months Ahead

**Get the Jump on Spring & Seedy Saturday**  
**Toronto Botanical Garden**  
**777 Lawrence Ave. E., Toronto.**  
**March 2 - 10 am to 4 pm**  
Admission is free - \$2 donation is suggested.



**ONIS is returning to this one-day garden extravaganza. Activities include:**

- Free garden chats and demonstrations
- Free gardening advice clinic offered by the Toronto Master Gardeners
- Free drop-in family nature activities and face painting
- Garden shop will be brimming with essentials for gardeners of all ages.
- Free Seed Swap – Bring your seeds to trade and take home something new to try!

For more information, visit the TBG website, [Home Page - Toronto Botanical Garden.](#)

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## Welcome New & Renewing Members!

K. Bailey – Toronto, ON

G. Ware – Gabriola Island, BC

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## Your 2023/2024 ONIS Board

Your Board for 2023/2024 is Terry Laurin, President, Jinny Missons, VP, Lyn Hickey, Treasurer, Kate Brewitt, Secretary. All Board members can be reached by emailing [just1moreiris@gmail.com](mailto:just1moreiris@gmail.com).

## AIS Matters

### Upcoming Conventions



**'New Horizons'**  
**2024 AIS/Japanese National Convention**  
**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

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### **2024 Convention Co-Chairs**

Contact: Chad Harris, [chadharris@prodigy.net](mailto:chadharris@prodigy.net)  
or John Ludi, [kludi@juno.com](mailto:kludi@juno.com), for details.

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