

ALMANAC:

Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris



Spring, 2009

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President, Debby Cole

7417 92nd Place SE, Mercer Island, WA. 98040
(206) 232-7745 e-mail: dcthree@juno.com

First Vice President, Michael Monninger

4861 Brookhill Terrace, Riverside, CA 92509
(909) 361-3177 e-mail: monninmd@sce.com

Second Vice President, Bob Sussman

12142 Alison Drive, Camarillo, CA 93012
(805)523-8604 e-mail: matilija@gte.net

Immediate Past President, Richard C. Richards

5885 Cowles Mt. Blvd., La Mesa, CA 91942
(619) 464-2180 e-mail: mongo2u@cox.net

Secretary-Treasurer, Terri Hudson

33450 Little Valley Road, Ft. Bragg, CA 95437
(707) 964-3907 e-mail: irishud@earthlink.net

COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Editor, Gareth Winter

64 Michael Street, Masterton, New Zealand
(00646) 377-5373 e-mail: wintergareth53@gmail.com

Historian/Archivist, Richard Richards

(See above for contact information)

Recorder, Kenneth Walker

1391 Santa Clara Ave., Concord, CA 94518
(925) 825-2350 e-mail: kenww001@astound.net

Seed Distribution, Bob Sussman

(See above for contact information)

Slide Programs, Terri Hudson

(See above for contact information)

Trek Chairman, Position Open

Web Manager, Steve Ayala

929 Pepperwood Lane, Petaluma CA 94952
e-mail: stevayla@sonic.net

ALMANAC REPRESENTATIVES

Canada, Harry Hill

RR22, 1533 Park Ave, Roberts Creek,
BC V0N 2W2, Canada
(604) 885-9769 email: harryh@dcnet.com

Washington, David A. Pettenski

3408 218th St. SE, Bothell, WA 98021
(425) 486-7705 e-mail: pettenski@hotmail.com

Oregon, Kenneth Hixson

88316 Thienes Lane, Springfield, OR 97478
(503) 747-4506 e-mail: khixson@nu-world.com

Northern California, Garry Knipe

7598 Kirwin Lane, Cupertino, CA 95014
(408) 253-6148 e-mail: knipe@worldnet.att.net

Southern California, Michael Monninger

4861 Brookhill Terrace, Riverside, CA 92509
(909) 361-3177 e-mail: monninmd@sce.com

Central U.S., Louise Carson

5037 NW 24th Place, Oklahoma City, OK 73127
(405) 947-1710 e-mail: nloucar@earthlink.net

Eastern U.S., David Schmieder

566 Old Road to NAC, Concord, MA 01742
(978) 369-3383 e-mail: ornacirises@verizon.net

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PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM THE SPCNI TREASURER

Prices listed are for SPCNI members

Check List of Named PCI Cultivars

Lists and describes Pacific Coast Native Iris and named hybrids through 2005. ~70 pages. Hardcopy or CD: \$9.00 for USA, \$11.00 for Canada, and \$13.00 overseas. For both a CD and a hard copy, the cost would be \$4.50 less for the CD.

SPCNI Photo CD

Compiled by *Ken Walker*. This CD includes 280+ photos \$9.00 US, \$11 CDN, \$13 other

A Guide to the Pacific Coast Irises

Victor A. Cohen: The British Iris Society 1967 Booklet, 5.5x 8.5, 40 pages, 16 line drawings, 8 color and 6 black-and-white photographs. Brief descriptions of species and sub-species including their distribution. \$8.00 postpaid, \$10.00 out of U.S.

A Revision of the Pacific Coast Irises

Lee W. Lenz: Photocopy of *Aliso* original. Booklet 5.5x8.5, 72 pages, 9 line drawings, 14 photographs and 12 maps. Definitive work on the taxonomic status of the *Californicae*, with a key to the species and sub-species. Detailed maps and accounts of distribution. \$8.00 postpaid, \$10.00 out of U.S.

Hybridization and Speciation in the Pacific Coast Irises

Lee W. Lenz: Photocopy of *Aliso* original. Companion booklet to the above, 5.5x8.5, 72 pages, 30 figures, graphs, drawings, and photographs. Definitive work on naturally occurring inter-specific crosses of PCI, including detailed account of distribution. \$8.00 postage paid; \$10.00 out of U.S. If ordered together, both Lenz booklets may be obtained for \$14.00, postpaid, \$16.00 out of US.

Diseases of the Pacific Coast Iris

Lewis & Adele Lawyer: ALMANAC, Fall 1986. 22 pages, 9 b/w photographs. \$4.50 postage paid, \$6.50 out of US.

SPCNI SLIDE SETS

Two slide sets are available through SPCNI. They can be obtained by requesting them from: Terri Hudson, 33450 Little Valley Road, Ft. Bragg, CA 95437 (707) 964-3907. The charge is \$7.50 for either of the two sets. The first set deals with species: the second set is concerned with hybrids. **The combination set is no longer available.** The slides in each set will be contained in a Kodak carousel. The carousel will be convenient to use and less likely to be damaged in shipment. Payment (payable to SPCNI) should be sent to Terri Hudson. The person requesting the slides is financially responsible for return of the slides.

ALMANAC

DEADLINES: March 15 and September 15.

Back issues are available for \$4.00 each, postpaid.

Index by Subject, Species, Hybrids or by Author, \$4.00 each postpaid. (This is also on the web site to download) Contact Terri Hudson at the address above.

MEMBERSHIP AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Society for Pacific Coast Native Irises is a

The opinions expressed in articles and letters appearing in this

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section of the American Iris Society (AIS).
 Membership in the AIS is recommended but not
 required for membership in the SPCNI.

Membership	Individual	Family
Annual	8.00	10.00
Triennial	20.00	23.00
10 year	60.00	75.00
20 year	110.00	125.00

Please send membership monies to the SPCNI
 treasurer. For foreign members, annual or triennial,
 please add \$4.00 per membership per year; 10/20
 year membership, please add \$20/\$40 per
 membership.

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION FROM THE
 SECRETARY/TREASURER
 DUES NOTICES**

First dues notices will no longer be sent. Please note
 the expiration date of your membership on the
 address label. This date indicates the month and year
 that your SPCNI fees are due. We will continue to
 send you a final reminder notice if we have not heard
 from you in 90 days.

AMERICAN IRIS SOCIETY

Membership of the American Iris Society is not
 required for SPCNI membership. AIS membership
 is, however, suggested, and may be of considerable
 benefit. Send membership renewals or inquiries to
 the AIS Membership Secretary:

Tom Gormley,
 10606 Timber Ridge St, Dubuque, IA 52001-8268
 e-mail: aismemsec@earthlink.net

Annual	Single	\$25.00
	Dual	\$30.00
Triennial	Single	\$60.00
	Dual	\$75.00
Life	Single	\$450.00
	Dual	\$545.00

Overseas rates:

Annual	Single	\$30.00
	Dual	\$35.00
Triennial	Single	\$65.00
	Dual	\$80.00

**PLEASE ADVISE SPCNI AND AIS
 OF ANY CHANGE OF ADDRESS**

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SPCNI MEMBERSHIP LIST

SPCNI is offering a listing of its membership to
 members for a slight fee to cover the cost of mailing
 and printing (approximately \$3.00 for the US, \$4.00
 for out of U.S.). This list can be used only for contact
 purposes and cannot be used or sold as a business
 mailing list. Members wishing to be excluded from
 the list should contact the Secretary.

Visit the award winning SPCNI website for great
 photos and articles

<http://www.pacificcoastiris.org>

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear members and friends,

Some of you in southern states have already seen your bloom season start, and those in the Southern Hemisphere have seen theirs end and have already collected seed. Please send some to Bob Sussman (labeled as a present of iris seed) for the Seed Exchange! My bloom season is soon to come, and I am getting excited, as usual.

Think of this message space as a sort of **SPCNI Bulletin Board**. Here are postings:

1. The Second Annual **Online Photo Contest** has concluded, and many thanks go to all those who submitted their exciting photos. Congratulations to Gareth Winter, Diane Whitehead and Ryan Grisso, whose winning entries you can see elsewhere in this issue. You can also view all the entries online, through the Bulletin Board section of the SPCNI website, www.pacificcoastiris.org/PhotoCont.html .

2. It has been decided **not to have a Trek this year**. Sorry, we were looking forward to it too, and we hope next year will work out better for all. The irises will still be there!

3. Seed Chair Bob Sussman is presenting the **SPCNI program at the AIS National Convention** in Missouri this May. Stop by, greet him and hear his talk on "Creating, Caring and Feeding Pacific Coast Irises" at 1 pm on Wednesday, May 13.

4. Do you have some great **photos of gardens, showcasing PCI**? We would like to include many more on an introductory program CD, and need your help. This CD is a PowerPoint presentation on Pacific Coast Irises, available from SPCNI and AIS to individuals for their own education and to clubs as a program. It covers examples of the different species and where they occur, some history of SPCNI and the major early PCI hybridizers, PCI which have won the Mitchell Award and/or the later Mitchell Medal, and Pacificas in home and civic gardens, the main reason for the hybridizing. I know many of us photograph the great look of PCI blooming in our gardens and wherever else we find them! If you would like to donate some suitable photos exclusively for SPCNI's use, please send your contributions this spring to Terri Hudson (address inside front cover).

5. The **SPCNI Seed Exchange** does a brisk trade every year, and always needs your contributions. If you track down a species in the wild, try to come back to that location six to eight weeks later and responsibly collect random seed pods. If a permit is needed, you have time! But equally desirable are seeds of garden hybrids, and they are even more accessible. For maximum benefit, self-pollinate your outstanding varieties, and be careful to keep the bugs and bees from beating you to it. The timing is about the same as for species, so make a note to yourself to start watching those pods about six weeks after bloom, and harvest seed from each variety separately if possible. Send them (clearly labeled) or promise of them to Bob Sussman by the beginning of September, so he can include them in the Seed Exchange listing.

6. Also, if you come upon a truly outstanding wild specimen that you decide to collect, take the trouble to record clear and accurate collection data, for later registration with AIS if it does well. This is the way the wild things can be documented and preserved, and it is important to future generations. See Registration at www.irises.org. **Note:** AIS is considering dropping the registration fee for wild-collected specimens.

Have a beautiful season,

Debby

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Gareth Winter

Autumn is a great time in the garden. The autumn flowering bulbs are safely flowering after the arrival of the March rains, and I have been spending a lot of time in the PCI beds, making room for a new crop of seedlings that need lining out.

The first task has been the gathering of last season's crop of seed. It is always exciting to see the filled seed pods slowly browning, bursting with fat seeds. There is disappointment as well, of course – those planned crosses that seemed so full of promise, but only return pods filled with air or aborted seeds. And of course, the weird and wonderful crosses that do not work.

Last year I read that one Australian breeder claimed to have introduced *I. unguicularis* into his breeding work, so I tried to cross with flowers from my some late flowering 'Starker's Pink.' The cross did not take, but I will try again this spring, using pollen from a couple of other varieties I have here, as long as they flower with the PCIs of course. I will also try the reverse cross, although it is more difficult to keep an eye on those *I. unguicularis* seed pods. As some of you will know, *I. unguicularis* flowers do not have very long stems, and the seed pods do not either! They sit an inch or so off the rhizome, hidden among the leaves.

This year I have carried out a little experiment with my seed. I have split the seeds from each cross in half, and sown the first group without any treatment, while the second group has been soaked for about two weeks. It will be interesting to see whether there is any substantial difference in germination rates.

My fellow New Zealand grower Bruce Kerr uses vermiculite to cover his seeds, and reports he gets very good results from his SPCNI seed. Vermiculite is a naturally occurring mineral that expands greatly when heated, becoming very light but capable of holding great amounts of water. Coarser grades are used in industry, but finer grades are often used in commercial horticulture for covering seeds for germination. Bruce uses a normal seed raising mix and covers the seed with a thin layer of vermiculite, a technique we used in our bedding plant nursery, very successfully.

I keep a database of all my seedlings, photographing them and attaching the images to the database, so I can easily see what each cross results in. In the spring, there always seems to be a mad rush with pollen from bed to bed, so it is interesting to look at photographs of the plants selected for the crosses – and sometimes to scratch my head trying to remember why I made the cross! Maybe these will be the most memorable.

During the year your executive committee was asked for a list of the most popular varieties, and we realized it had been some years since we undertook a survey to find our members' favorites. A quick e-mail survey was circulated, but the response was disappointing, with very few correspondents replying.

Those who did answer were mainly from the margins of the PCI world, and their answers were very illuminating. Most confessed they had been unsuccessful in keeping named varieties alive and many said they were concentrating on raising their own strains. Each grower is selecting seedlings, and thus strains, that survive satisfactorily in their particular environment, rather than persisting with named cultivars that may have been raised in conditions that are far from their own.

Here in New Zealand we are forced to follow that method – it is very difficult and expensive to import named cultivars. Many of us not in the United States of America rely on the SPCNI members' contributions to the seed pool to increase our gene pool. I heartily endorse Debby Cole's exhortation for members to contribute seed to the pool. Might I make a special plea for members to supply seed from some of the newest introductions? Those of us in the far flung corners of the PCI world are reliant on your contributions as we strive to extend the range of plants we can grow, by adding new genes to our locally developed strains.

Best wishes for a northern spring from a southern autumn

Gareth

TREASURER'S REPORT

BALANCE SHEETS as of 12/31/08

Assets

Cash and Bank Accounts		
CD account		4,757.25
Checking	4,295.00	
Memorial CD		2,424.40
<hr style="border: 0.5px solid black;"/>		
Total Cash and Bank Accounts		11,476.65
 Total Assets		 11,476.65

Liabilities

	0.00	
Equity		11,476.65
Total Liabilities & Equity		11,476.65

INCOME STATEMENT 1/1/08 -12/31/08

Income/Expenses

Income

Back almanacs	25.29	
Book sales:		
Checklist	9.00	
Cohen	24.00	
Total book sales		33.00
Donations		19.60
Dues		967.00
Memorial funds		20.00
Photo CD		31.50
Seed Exchange	743.00	
Slide rentals	7.50	
Total Income		1,846.89

Expenses

Almanac		1,990.49
Misc expense		20.00
Office		380.97
Secretary-Treasurer		
Postage		42.00
Transfer to Memorial CD		350.00
Web Page		134.91
Total Expenses		2,918.37

Total Income/Expenses -1,071.48

MEMORIAL CD

Income/Expenses		
Income		
Donations	2,000.00	
Interest Earned	94.40	
Total Income		2,094.40

DEPOSIT CD

Income		
Interest Earned	31.29	
Total Income		31.29

GROWING PCIs IN MANY DIFFERENT CONDITIONS

My call for reports of favorite varieties of PCIs lead to some interesting reports from growers who are trying to grow Pacificas in conditions far removed from the areas where they evolved – Britain, Germany and Russia., as well as eastern regions of the United States.

Anja Pansin, who lives in a very small town called Geislingen which is about 60 kilometers south of Stuttgart and about 100 kilometers from the Swiss border, wrote to report her experiences:

I am sorry - I am new to growing PCI irises and therefore I can not say which ones grow best for me in my zone 6 garden.

Last year I bought some named cultivars from the USA in the spring and fall. Most of the PCIs I bought in spring died but all of the fall PCIs have survived so far, so I guess fall might be the better time to transplant them. As we had a very early and heavy freeze in fall 2008 I planted the fall PCIs in pots and put the pots in a protected position. Our winter 2008/2009 has been the coldest winter for many decades (with only little snow cover, temperature -20 degrees Celsius or -4 degrees Fahrenheit) so I am happy I did not plant them in the garden. The PCIs I bought were from “Wildwood Gardens” in Oregon. Will Plotner is a very kind and helpful man. In spring and fall 2008 I bought several iris collections from him. I do not remember the cultivar names but I bought PCI, Siberian and Japanese iris collections. Most of the Siberians and all of the Japanese irises survived. All but two of the spring 2008 PCIs did not develop new roots and they died.

Unfortunately it is very expensive to ship the plants here to Germany. I always share my order with two friends. Otherwise I would not be able to buy plants in the USA. I do not know a commercial source for PCIs here in Germany, but I know several people (from a German gardening forum) in different climates in Germany who grow *Iris douglasiana*, so I suspect it is sufficiently cold hardy here in Germany. I wonder if *Iris tenax* is cold hardy, too?

At the moment I am waiting for the seeds I ordered in the seed exchange. In the next few years I will report how the seedlings grow for me. I love hybridizing and growing iris seedlings (so far I have only grown bearded and Siberian iris seedlings - just for my own pleasure, not for registration/introduction). Hopefully I can grow (and maybe hybridize) some hardy PCIs from seeds obtained through the seed exchange.

Sergey Loktev, in Moscow, Russia, sent this report:

I did not succeed in all my attempts to grow PCIs in Moscow exactly. Maybe the first attempt was in 1998 or 1999. I obtained three varieties from Terry Aitken . It was springtime when I received and planted them. It turned out they did not want to live in my garden and dried off during two to three weeks. I probably planted them in too sunny a place. I must say I am too lazy (even with TBs) to study agrotechnics etc. (I would like only to make crosses) so in many cases it might be my fault when I lose plants.

In 2000 I brought home about 20 PCI varieties from Bob Annand and planted them on shadier place. I also sowed seeds. About half of the varieties were alive next spring though they were weak. Three of my colleagues (from Moscow and Kuban region) who visited CA, OR & WA in 2000 with me also tried to plant some PCIs but did not have success with them. Some seeds germinated but only a few (maybe I also did something wrong with them). Imagine my great surprise when I found a bud on one of the varieties. In several days I saw the bloom. It was wonderful delicate ‘Skylash’, Belardi ’94. There caused great excitement for me as it meant PCIs can probably grow here. I took a photo of the plant and put it into our next bulletin. It was the first PCI bloom in the RIS members’ gardens if not in Russia at all. But later more plants died and the next year I had only seven PCI plants – four introduced varieties and three seedlings – and had no bloom. That year I brought *I. innominata* (if I am not mistaken) from Keith Keppel and also some seeds. Unfortunately next year I had no PCIs in my garden. In November 2002 we had a strong frosts (- 25C or lower) without any snow cover and I never protect my any plants. I also lost more than 500 TB varieties that time.

Then I decided to try only seeds and ordered them from Joe Ghio. Again germination was bad and I had only several weak plants. In late September of 2007 I planted about 20 PCIs from Will Plotner but since they traveled about a month they came almost dried and next spring I found only four or five small sprouts which died in about a month. Last spring I also brought ‘Blue Moment’, Meek ’92 from Sebright Gardens and unknown PCI plant

from Rick and Kati Ernst. After planting they began to slowly dry. In a couple of months I replanted them on shadier place and they recovered a little. I also had two small seedlings in the fall. Now I am waiting for PCI seeds which Barry Blyth promised to send me from his daughter Heidi. I plan to continue my attempts and hope that one day something will survive here - certainly not under the hot sun but in shady place. We do not often have strong frosts without any snow cover

Liselotte Hirsbrunner lives in Switzerland, just about 35 minutes drive from the shores of Lake Geneva (Lac Lemman) and Montreux, but with a totally different climate. Her garden is at 1300m in the mountains. She says “people come here to ski, not to grow a garden!”

My obsession began with pictures of some hybrid PCIs in a NARGS bulletin (1990 I think?) I just had to try and joined SPCNI in order to be able to get seeds. Some seeds took their time to germinate; others did not germinate at all. The few seedlings that survived were planted out in areas that I thought would be ideal, paying attention to what I had read on the subject. Starting seeds every year, I was beginning to lose interest because wildlife, especially the birds had made a total mess of my labels, pulling them out of the ground and dropping them anywhere. But then the first iris bloomed. It obviously was a hybrid, yellow with maroon markings and wide ruffled falls. Soon I was reading about Dr Tomas Tamberg’s work with interspecies. I had been playing with *Iris sibirica* pollen for several years and was very fond of the 40 chromosome Sino-sibiricas. However they did not live long here. For several years all I did was cross PCIs with Sino-sibs and reverse, hoping to get some easy to grow irises. It did not take too long to realize, that PCIs once established did much better than the Sino-sibs or the few Calsibes, provided if they were grown in a special microclimate, in this case, on a south facing bank under old larch trees where the plants had practically full sun for part of the day. The acid mulch of the larch is ideal and in the summer the ground is very dry under these trees. In the winter we have good snow cover. Yet I have to admit, when the winter sun gets stronger, the snow melts fast on the steep banks and I feel I have to shovel snow on the PCIs for protection from freezing at night.

Species and hybrids will do equally well once established, however, in one area I took advantage of my neighbors old trees. Unfortunately, they had several trees removed and within two years the plants, mostly species, grown in that area all died. The soil was simply too wet in the summer, while a few feet away, on a much steeper bank, hybrids and species survived. I am still learning....

In the fall of 2003 I ordered PCIs by mail from a nursery on the west coast along with quite a few Japanese irises. The plants were strong and healthy; all survived the first winter and bloomed! The Japanese irises are still with me, but only one PCI survived. It is ‘Endless’ and what a beauty! But I decided to stick with starting them from seed because I am still searching for the perfect time to transplant. That seems to be the biggest challenge now.

Brita Carson, a well-known British irisarian who lives in Lockerbie, Scotland. She sent the following:

All my plants are seed sown but I got a really nice plant from Geoff Wilson sown from Ghio seed. I also sent to Joe Ghio for seed last year. This year I'm getting seed from Bob Sussman.

One discovery I have found. (probably obvious to experienced growers) that the seedlings that I surrounded with pine needles are growing away without any losses whereas the ones I surrounded with granite gravel are showing signs of neck rot and I may well have lost most of them. The compost is not identical in the two places and they are in different areas of the garden so not a true comparison but interesting to me. I will do a bit of experimenting this year.

Some American correspondents reported difficulties with named varieties too. **Kenneth Hixson** reports from Springfield, Oregon:

Our editor has asked for a list of the favourite ten varieties in this area. This presents a couple problems.

First, only ten varieties? I would really like to be able to suggest the best ten varieties, but I cannot - I like them all, some more than others, yes, but each has its own beauty.

I like some PCI because they make large clumps of foliage (*I. douglasiana*) which are an attractive contrast

to other plants. Other plants are small, “rock garden” or planter size plants - *I. douglasiana* 'Mini Ma', *I. innominata*, etc. Some plants flower early, and open the season. Others flower late and miss the rain, frost, and slugs. Color, form, branching flowering stems, etc-- each has its own attraction. My choice is the one I am looking at.

Secondly, and much more embarrassingly, something I do not really like to admit - I have not been very successful at growing named varieties.

Before going further, some background. Most of my gardens have been in western Oregon, within 100 miles of the Pacific Ocean, and the climate is “modified Mediterranean”, meaning we have wet and cool winters and dry summers. We may have three months without measurable rainfall, from mid-May to September, offset somewhat by having nights that cool down to the 60s F (15.5 C). The last several years we've had USDA Zone 8 winters, down to about +15F (~ -10C), but in my gardening lifetime I have seen -12F (~ -25C) once for a couple days, and a couple times -5F (~ -20.5C).

Iris tenax is a common native, common enough that most people recognize it as an iris. *I. chrysophylla* is less common, and usually at higher elevations. Most of the other Pacific Coast iris, although not native, will grow here except perhaps *I. munzii*, which has the reputation of being not overly hardy. Selections of *I. munzii* do live for at least a few years, so patient selection may yield varieties or hybrids that will be hardy.

I started growing *I. tenax*, our common local native iris because I thought we need to make space in our gardens for native wildflowers, whose habitat is being modified or destroyed by man's activities. Although some people assert that native plants are best because they have evolved to the local climate, these same people usually forget to mention that all the pests and diseases that affect native plants are also present. Once a large number of plants are available in a garden setting, the pest or disease can also be expected to show up in gardens.

When I started, I planned to grow native iris species and distribute seed to various seed exchanges. This became an impossible dream when seeds of various species from my garden were planted, the seedlings flowered. They were obviously not pure – the bees had had their way, even though the iris were well separated. There were even flowers in the clump of *I. tenax* that obviously were not pure *I. tenax*. Not only had bees carried pollen some distance, but the seed had fallen, germinated in the parent clump, and grown to flowering size. I am now reluctant to distribute the seed I once hoped to share, as the recipient may not understand that the resulting seedlings may be hybrids.

This is embarrassing enough, but the story of named hybrid varieties is even worse. I do not grow iris as a monoculture, they are grown as part of the garden planting, enjoyed for their spring flowers, but also regarded as flowering, vertical accent and border plants, mixed with woody shrubs and various other compatible plants. The first named varieties purchased were planted where they were to grow and did well, and I wanted more. Catalogs offered exciting new colors that seemed really wonderful. Losses did occur- hard winters took their toll, other plants overgrew the PCIs, plants were lost when moved, etc. New plants and replacement plants were less successful - some of the newly purchased plants did not grow, then in future years more failed, until finally almost all of the newly purchased plants failed. Instead of being planted where they were to grow, they were then tried in holding beds, in cold frames, in pots - and still purchased plants were lost. Meanwhile, plants grown from seed, from whatever source, seemed to do well, and could be moved about the garden as needed - and of course, seedlings are unknown quantities until they flower. If some were lost to hard winters, or were less attractive than sister seedlings, so what? I just grew more. I would prefer to be able to buy and plant named varieties and have them survive, but seedlings now seem a better choice, and will give almost the same effect.

Almost all of the PCIs in my garden are now seedlings. They do not have the immense size I expect from named varieties, nor the colorings, but if they don't suit the spot where they grow, there is no reluctance to move them to another spot. In a word, I now think strains are a better choice than named varieties.

I. douglasiana 'Mini Ma' has been purchased and lost three times during cold winters, but seedlings are coming that retain the dwarf habit. 'Canyon Snow' makes a lovely – if very large - clump, but it did not withstand the recent move of my garden, and the purchased replacement has also died. Seed is often available, and even if not exactly the same as the original is still worthwhile.

Local gardeners often do not know what a Pacific Coast Iris is, but when they see them in flower, they like them, and if they were available in a nursery, would be happy to buy them. Not everyone is willing to grow things from seed, or wait to see what the flowers of the seedlings will be like in a couple years. As a result gardeners

prefer to buy plants like Pacific Coast Iris in flower, so they know what they are getting. Pacific Coast Iris plants flower in late spring, just ahead of the hot summer weather, which is a poor time to plant PCI and establish a root ball. Growing in containers is one way of providing a plant with an established root ball.

Growing PCI in containers does present some challenges. In this area, PCIs sometimes do not survive the winter if grown in containers, presumably because the roots freeze. If containers have to be protected from freezing in winter, that adds to the cost of growing PCI by nurseries, and thus is undesirable. PCI Plants that would grow, survive the winter, and flower in containers would be far more desirable to the nursery trade - and prices would be more competitive.

Our (relatively) cool summers seem to allow growing PCI in containers with summer water, something that may not be possible in areas with hotter summers where our cold winters are not a problem. Nurseries have thin profit margins, and plants that suffer heavy losses in winter are unlikely to be favored. I am not writing to support the nursery industry as such, but making PCIs available in flower to more gardeners seems the best way to make them more popular, and more widely grown. It is not likely that any nursery will make a lot of money growing PCI, in fact I suspect they may be a “loss leader”, grown to offer something different, even if at a higher than usual price.

Not all PCI are likely to meet standard nursery practices. One possible exception is the cross *I. purdyi* x *I. macrosiphon* which has yielded some seedlings that seem to survive in containers, and also have the happy habit of not making clumps that become bare in the center. Flowers are small with a “species look”, but the plants are a start. Other similar hybrids might work just as well, and might be worth trying. Some PCI, *Iris tenax* as an example, produce rhizomes that grow over the edge of the container and put out their roots, which do not contact the soil, the roots then die, and eventually so does that rhizome, and then the whole plant dies. *I. tenax* is not a good choice for growing in containers for longer than a year or two, even though it is native here. Plants of *Iris tenax* in containers should be planted or discarded when the rhizomes grow over the edge of the container

Some of the things worth looking for that may be found in PCI include:

- Flower colors and patterns are obviously attractive, even to the most casual viewer. “Cartwheel” flower forms are nice, particularly for flowers that are looked down upon, but are less attractive in a vase indoors and should not be the only flower form.
- More flowers per stem often means a longer flower season.
- Erect stems mean flowers are less likely to be spattered with mud when it rains. *Iris tenax* flower stems start erect, but rain will not only spatter mud, it will cause them to lean over, and flowers on the ground are lunch for the ever present slugs and snails.
- Flower season is important - April flowers are often damaged both by weather and slugs. We may have rainy weather well into May, and slugs and snails find iris flowers delicious, thank you! June flowers seem much less attractive to slugs and snails, perhaps because there are other things in flower.
- Fragrance is elusive, but possible, and is a continuing quest.
- Plant size makes many PCI “front of the border” plants, from ‘Mini Ma’ dwarf plants to *I. douglasiana* clumps that, at two feet or more tall with broad green leaves in fountains, are not really “front of the border”.
- Some forms of *I. douglasiana* are worth growing as a foliage plant. People have asked for plants from my garden when there was not a flower to be seen. Other PCI foliage may show maroon red bases, or gray tones, etc.

To sum up this rambling story, choosing favorite varieties is hard. I would like to recommend named varieties to those who ask, and I would be happy to buy Pacific Coast Iris plants - bare root or otherwise, if I thought they would survive, and other gardeners who have seen my plants would also. Certainly those who see my PCI seem eager to grow them, but past experience buying bare root plants has been unhappy and at least for now growing from seed seems to be a better option than recommending named varieties, much though I wish otherwise. I do share plants as I can, and offer seed, but many of the ordinary gardeners in this area unfortunately are not willing to grow PCI from seed, and that leaves me at a loss for a recommendation. Pacific Coast Iris can be a welcome plant in gardens in this area, but not for ordinary gardeners until something changes, and strains seem to be, if not the only answer, at least a possible solution.

David Schmieder, the Eastern U.S Almanac representative, sent this message:

I was later than I should have been in contacting the members in my area. For that reason, and also because most of us in the U.S. East of the Mississippi River are not able to keep the named varieties around long enough to develop favorites, I am not surprised to have received such a small number of responses.

The first was from **Dorothy Willot**, Beachwood, Ohio:

Since all my PCIs have died, I cannot say that any are my best performers. They are all so beautiful, but we never found the secret to growing them well.

I appreciated her quick response, and suppose she represents the status of most of those not responding. However, I was delighted to receive the following from **Susan Lambiris**, Raleigh, North Carolina:

Number 1 in my book remains 'Big Money'. Its individual blooms are not blockbusters (though it's a very attractive yellow self) but it is by far my best garden plant in terms of vigor, heavy and extended bloom, and overall eye-catching appearance. I've had it for twelve years now, through drought, harsh (and very easy) winters, ice storms, and wet summers; nothing seems to give it pause.

Number 2 is 'Umunhum'. I love the color combination and this is the most vigorous orange-to-brown iris I have had. I grow it in a fairly shady location and it copes very nicely; in part sun it might be more vigorous. Number 3 is 'High Splendor'. While there are blue-and-white iris with more attractive blooms this one, like 'Big Money', is vigorous and floriferous, and always looks handsome in my garden.

Number 4 is 'Clever Devil'. Short but showy and tough - I like the way the blooms change color but never become unattractive as they age.

Number 5 is 'Westerlies'. Another handsome and vigorous plant. It does not always open its blooms perfectly but it always catches the eye from a distance! It and 'High Splendor' make a lovely combination every spring.

Others that have won my respect include 'Tiki', 'Silver Bowl', 'Herald', and 'Bat Boy', though none of these is as impressive as my top five. I am also very fond of 'Fault Zone', although it suffered badly in a recent harsh winter, and of 'Deep Blue Sea', although it is more purple than blue for me and also is a weak grower in my garden.

As for myself, I have not been able to keep any named varieties around for more than a year or two, and therefore cannot in good conscience pick favorites. I will definitely take note of the results that Susan and others outside the natural range of PCIs have achieved with their choices, and at least continue my efforts to keep up with the seed exchange, looking for seed from such varieties as those (I again failed to get my order in this year but always have hope for the future). In the meantime I will continue hoping for more resistance to our climate by what seedlings I propagate from generation to generation.

The veteran grower **Richard Richards**, gardening in the hottest parts of Southern California offered another thoughtful response;

I believe named varieties available to the commercial trade must be able to take a wide range of conditions. Many of them cannot. I think we should use only the superior clones for hybridizing.

The following irises have done very well for me in the hot interior climate of Southern California. Since I insist on treating them as ordinary garden subjects, and in an ordinary interior Southern California garden watering is done at least twice a week, these PCIs have been subjected to the potent killer of PCIs: heat combined with moisture. I water twice a week by overhead sprinkler, though I don't recommend it to people who merely want to grow PCIs successfully.

The varieties below all successfully ignore that potentially deadly combination of heat and moisture. They are mostly planted under shade screen, and get very little direct sun. I believe that keeps the soil temperature under critical levels during the summer. However, some of the clones have been grown in considerable sunlight (four hours or so), with the potentially lethal watering schedule, and have come through it just fine.

'Canyon Snow' Superlatives sell this clone short. It is ruggedly dependable under the worst of conditions. It takes considerable sun along with heat and water. Probably the most vigorous and hardy for hot climates. It is also an excellent parent, though underused by many hybridizers.

'Ami Royale' Dependable and takes a lot of sunlight if it has to.

‘Munras’	Also takes quite a bit of sunshine, but does better with shade.
‘Los Californio’	Showy and tough. I have not attempted to divide this clone yet, but I will this coming winter. We will see how easily it divides at that point. It is a vigorous grower.
‘Susie Knapp’	Will take considerable sunshine. Stalks are short when grown with more than four hours of sun a day. Grown in shade, stalks are long and snaky. It does have a branched stem. Divides easily.
‘Orchid Resprite’	Takes sun all day in some inland locations. Does fine in the shade. If you want vigor, this one has it. Divides fairly well.
‘Blue Moment’	Does great in the shade. Vigorous, and transplants easily. I have not tried it in a sunny location, but I suspect it will adapt to that also.
‘Idylwild’	Takes sun or shade. Usually an easy divider.
‘Joey’	From a hot interior climate, and happy with considerable sun or shade. Vigorous, and divides easily.
‘Clarice Richards’	Will take a couple of hours of direct sun, but prefers light shade. Will do fine in heavier shade too.
‘Gravitas’	Flourishing under the shade cloth. Divides happily. Would probably take quite a bit of direct sun, but I have not tried it out in those conditions.
‘San Andreas’	Doing just fine under the shade cloth. Very early bloomer.
‘Blue Sage’	Likes sunshine, for at least four hours a day. I have not tried it under shade cloth. Does not mind a liberal watering schedule, but objects to being continually wet, a condition I subjected it to by planting it near a dripping faucet. The side of the clump died off in the continually moist area. My clump has been in the same location for nearly thirty years, with pieces of it being removed most winters to share with others and to keep it somewhat restrained.
‘Chimes’	Takes sun, shade, and everything in between. Does not mind two sessions of watering a week during the summer. Divides easily.

There are other clones that I am testing with my ridiculous schedule of watering during the heat of summer, but I have not had them long enough to find out how hardy they are. Several look promising. Some appear near death. Time will take its course.

Michael Monninger, also in a hot area of California, listed his favorites:

‘Canyon Snow’	A terrific grower and best of section winner for me. It brings a smile just seeing it.
‘Mantra’	Grows tall and is strong in our heat.
‘Sea Gal’	A strong grower for our heat and I won best of show with it.
‘Pacific High’	I won best of show with it many years ago.
‘Idylwild’	Withstands our heat and the flowers are tops. The main problem is our heat causes it to bloom short. Only once was the winter cold enough for it to bloom at its height.
‘Clarice Richards’	It grows well in our heat as it should coming from Richard Richards.
‘Orchid Resprite’	A good grower in our area.

Where I live there is an endemic beetle that feeds on fruit and horse and cow waste. Lots of dairies and horses allow a large population of these pests. The grub stage lives in the soil, getting as large as your thumb, and feeding on succulent roots and other organic matter. The end result is dead PCNs. I try some PCNs from time to time and will try again. Most of the dairies have moved and the horses are going due to changing demographics and economics.

I have referred to heat and I need to make sure you understand its significance. In July, August, and half of September we can expect ten continuous days or more in each month with day temps at 105. This is hazardous to PCNs. The older cultivars seem to grow well in our heat but that can be attributable to many hybridizers in the 60s and 70s lived in southern California. The newer cultivars have been selected for decades in the cool beach climate and have a hard time in our heat.

Bob Sussman, also in California and our brilliant seed pool director, listed his favorites too:

My list of favorites it is mostly determined by what seems to grow well for me in Southern California which is much warmer than most (make that all) the areas in which the species naturally occur.

So here goes the list:

Canyon Snow
Mission Santa Cruz
Warm Sunshine
Carmel Gem
Ami Royale
Osocales
Untitled
San Ardo

SPCNI TREK

It has been decided not to have a Trek this year. Sorry, we were looking forward to it too, and we hope next year will work out better for all. The irises will still be there!

SPCNI AT AIS CONVENTION

Seed Chair Bob Sussman is presenting the SPCNI program at the AIS National Convention in Missouri this May. Stop by, greet him and hear his talk on "Creating, Caring and Feeding Pacific Coast Irises".

1 pm on Wednesday, May 13

HARDY OLDER CULTIVARS

Richard C. Richards

The hardiness of some PCI cultivars has to be seen to be believed. I have seen it and I believe it. There is a story here, one I think needs telling not only for the information on the irises, but also for the dedication of one lover of the PCIs.

The story takes place in Yucaipa, a small town nearly 100 miles east of Los Angeles and about 25 miles or so west of Palm Springs, a well-known Southern California desert resort. Yucaipa has a desert-like climate, but water has turned the area into a citrus growing region. It has hot summers and winters that rarely drop to freezing.

The story involves Bob Hubley, a PCI hybridizer whose last commercial garden, Longview Gardens, was in Yucaipa. Hubley was a master grower and hybridizer of PCIs. Lee Lenz entrusted Hubley to introduce several of his *I. munzii* hybrids. In 1991 Hubley died, but the story was just beginning.

Chick and Hedi Taylor were living next door to the Hubleys. Hedi especially has a love of plants, and she became familiar with the PCIs at that time. When Bob Hubley died, his widow Ellie invited Hedi

to dig any of the PCIs she wanted, since she was not going to maintain Bob's commercial garden. Hedi says the Hubley garden had been neglected for some time due to Bob's failing health, and in the early spring she dug as many rhizomes from the neglected and hardened soil as she could. She took them home, dug out an area around one of her citrus trees, mixed in soil that Bob had built according to his own formula, and watered the rhizomes in. She kept them moist all spring. That they grew is an understatement.

In conversations with Ellie Hubley twelve or thirteen years later, I learned that Hedi Taylor might still have some of those irises. Hoping to find some of the Lenz creations still alive, I contacted Mrs. Taylor, who invited me to come out to see what she had the next spring.

I came - I saw - I was amazed.

There, under the citrus tree, the irises were still thriving. They had not been disturbed at any time in the last thirteen or so years, and were getting whatever the citrus trees were getting, which was a deep watering every week or so, plenty of fertilizer (Miraclegro sprayings and occasional granulated citrus fertilizer), and much admiration from Mrs. Taylor. Deep watering consisted of leaving a hose on to trickle water around the base of the citrus tree overnight. The Taylor stand grows in the shade of the citrus tree, but Hedi Taylor says they get two or three hours of afternoon sun.

I thought I recognized the clones, but when Hedi Taylor offered to let me dig some the following fall, I eagerly accepted the invitation, went out to Yucaipa the following December, dug some rhizomes from all sides of the bed, and brought them to my garden.

In the spring, by direct comparison, I established that the clones were 'Orchid Resprite' and 'Susie Knapp'. I verified this by getting rhizomes from Ellie Hubley, who was still growing 'Orchid Resprite' under quite sunny conditions in Banning, which is even closer to Palm Springs. Wanting to know if other clones could also thrive under those conditions, I offered to bring some other cultivars to plant under another citrus tree in the yard. Hedi Taylor agreed, and two winters ago I brought out rhizomes of 'Canyon Snow' and 'Clarice Richards', two hardy clones in my garden that have a good reputation in Southern California. Last spring I did not get a chance to see the new transplants, which Hedi Taylor assured me were thriving. This year I did, and all the clumps were surprisingly large and doing quite well. The photos I took were early for peak bloom, but there were flowers and plenty of buds.

Hedi Taylor has one more citrus tree with no irises under it. I am tempted to see if she wants some more PCIs. Maybe some of the newer cultivars should be tried under the same circumstances?

There are some conclusions we can draw from this story.

All the irises are older clones, which immediately display some hardiness in that they have survived for decades. More importantly, they are all *I. douglasiana* or mostly *douglasiana* clones. *I. douglasiana* seems to be the hardiest of the species when it comes to geographical range. It appears to take heat pretty well, and some clones of it stay in moist conditions all year around in its native range. While heat combined with moisture seem to be killers of most of the *Californicae* species and hybrids, *I. douglasiana* has been reported to thrive in irrigated pastures in Northern California, where it is considered a weed.

This species will survive temperatures down to at least 15 degrees F., though the foliage may suffer some cold damage. *I. douglasiana* also has a very long bloom season. In its native range it may bloom in November, though I have no experience with this, and only some information. I have seen it blooming near the coast of Northern California in July. Clones of largely *douglasiana* background have shown some bloom on occasion in July in my own garden in Corona, mostly when May and June have been particularly mild. The real heat in Corona usually starts in late June.

Some cultivars of mostly *douglasiana* background have bloomed in commercial and home gardens in November. Some of Joe Ghio's introductions in past years had November bloom in their

home garden in Santa Cruz, near the ocean. Garry Knipe's seedling, ABSA_3, derived from Ghio lines, will bloom in November in San Jose in the San Francisco Bay area if it gets sufficient water from early rains or from irrigation.

We can also learn from Hedi Taylor's experience that heavy fertilization, enough to keep citrus trees happy, seems to keep the PCIs growing vigorously in her garden. Reports of fertilizer use in other gardens suggest that most PCIs will benefit from it.

Apparently Mrs Taylor was only able to rescue 'Orchid Resprite' and 'Susie Knapp' from the Hubley garden. Whether newer cultivars in the Hubley garden, or the exotic Lenz hybrids, would have thrived under these conditions in the Taylor garden, is speculation at best. Perhaps she did get a rhizome or two of other cultivars from the Hubley garden, but they could not cope with the more vigorous mostly *I. douglasiana* cultivars she did get, or the watering and fertilizing schedule to which Mrs. Taylor subjects them.

We will never know. But we do know more now about the hardiness of at least some *I. douglasiana* derived cultivars. Someone hybridizing for irises that will grow in marginal conditions would do well to consider using this sort of genetic material for a breeding program. Careful tracing of pedigrees of later introductions can often reveal which those are, as well as familiarity with *I. douglasiana* characteristics that may be obvious from visual inspection.

PCIs have the genetic heritage to thrive in a wider range of climates than had hitherto been generally believed. Mrs. Hedi Taylor is only one of the gardeners who are proving that.



The original bed at the Taylor garden

PACIFICA IRIS ONLINE PHOTO CONTEST

This year we received 18 entries in the Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris online photo contest: three in the Landscape / Habitat section and fifteen in the Individual flower category. Three judges selected the following as the best:

LANDSCAPE / HABITAT

- **Winner** - Ryan Grisso's shot of his daughter Giana, whose first task after arriving home after school was to check for fragrant iris.



- **Runner-up** - Diane Whitehead's photo of Garry Knipe and Debby Cole looking for keepers among some of Garry's Pacifica seedlings planted in a section of Joe Ghio's garden near Santa Cruz, California.



- **Second-runner up** – *Iris bracteata* with reddish spathes, growing just north of Cave Junction, Oregon. Photographed by Diane Whitehead.



INDIVIDUAL FLOWER

- **Winner** - Gareth Winter's Pacifica iris seedling of "Magic Sea", from SPCNI seed.



- **Runner-up** - Ryan Grisso's Pacifica iris seedling of "Bubble Gum".



- **Second runner-up** - Ryan Grisso's photograph of unnamed Pacifica iris hybrid seedlings.



VIEWERS CHOICE

BEST LANDSCAPE / HABITAT PHOTO - Diane Whitehead's photo of Garry Knipe and Debby Cole in Joe Ghio's garden, as above.

BEST INDIVIDUAL FLOWER PHOTO - Diane Whitehead's photo of buds on seedlings of the Pacifica iris hybrid "Just My Type".

