

Society for Pacific Coast Native Irises  
ALMANAC



# John Taylor seedlings from Australia



## FRONT COVER

One of the exciting seedlings coming from John Taylor's breeding programme.  
Details on his work follow on page 11, and more photographs on page 19

# Almanac of the Society for Pacific Coast Native Irises

Volume IXXXX, Number 2, Spring 2011

## SPCNI MEMBERSHIP

The Society for Pacific Coast Native Irises (SPCNI) is a section of the American Iris Society (AIS). Membership in AIS is recommended but not required for membership in SPCNI.

	US	Overseas
Annual, paper	\$8.00	\$12.00
Triennial, paper	\$20.00	\$32.00
Annual, digital	\$5.00	\$5.00
Triennial, digital	\$13.00	\$13.00

Lengthier memberships are no longer available.

New prices (see website) will be effective July 1, 2011

Please send membership fees to the SPCNI Treasurer.

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION FROM THE SECRETARY/TREASURER ABOUT DUES NOTICES

Members who get paper copies, please keep track of the expiration date of your membership, which is printed on your Almanac address label. We include a letter with your last issue, and may follow this with an email notice, if you have email. Members who get digital copies will get an email message after receiving the last issue.

If you have a question about your membership expiration date, contact the Secretary. Also contact the Secretary if your contact information changes in any way, including phone, e-mail and mailing addresses.

## AMERICAN IRIS SOCIETY

Membership in AIS is not required for SPCNI membership, but it is encouraged and may be of considerable benefit to gardeners new to growing iris. Send membership renewals or inquiries to the AIS Membership Secretary, or enroll on line at: <http://www.irises.org/member.htm>.

Tom Gormley - AIS Membership Secretary, P.O. Box 177, DeLeon Springs, FL 32130.

Phone and fax: 386-277-2057 E-mail: [aismemsec@irises.org](mailto:aismemsec@irises.org)

## MEMBERSHIP RATES, AIS

	US	Overseas
Annual, single	\$25.00	\$30.00
Annual, dual	\$30.00	\$35.00
Triennial, single	\$60.00	\$65.00
Triennial, dual	\$75.00	\$80.00
Life, single	\$450.00	NA
Life, dual	\$545.00	NA

## PLEASE ADVISE SPCNI & AIS OF ANY CHANGE OF ADDRESS

ALMANAC DEADLINES: March 15 and September 15.

The opinions expressed in articles and letters appearing in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views or beliefs of the SPCNI. Remarks about specific irises, companies, products and services shall not be considered endorsements by the SPCNI

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Spring 2011 Volume IXXXX Number 2

## PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM THE SPCNI TREASURER

Prices listed are for SPCNI members in the US. For out of US, please add \$3.00.

### PRINT ARTICLES

**Check List of named PCI species and cultivars, 2005**

Lists species and named cultivars and hybrids to 2005. \$9.00  
If ordering both print and CD checklist versions together,  
\$14.00

**A Guide to the Pacific Coast Irises**

Victor A. Cohen, 1967

Reprint of British Iris Society 1967 booklet, describing  
species sub-species and distributions. 40 pages, \$8.00

**A Revision of the Pacific Coast Irises Lee W. Lenz,**  
1958 Reprint of Aliso journal article 5.5x8.5, 72 pages. \$8.00

**Hybridization and Speciation in the Pacific Coast Irises**

Lee W. Lenz, 1959. Reprint of Aliso article 72 pages, \$8.00  
If ordering both of Dr Lenz's reprints, \$14.00

**Diseases of the Pacific Coast Iris**

Lewis & Adele Lawyer, 1986. Fall 1986 Almanac, 22 pages,  
\$4.50

**Almanac Index, 2005,**

includes the following indices: author, subject, species,  
hybrids, \$4.00, or download PDF on the SPCNI website for  
free.

### COMPACT DISCS

**SPCNI Photo CD, 2009.**

Compiled by Ken Walker, this CD includes 423 photos of  
species and hybrids, neatly labeled. \$9.00.

**SPCNI Almanac CD, 2009.**

All issues of the Almanac through 2007, with Index, also  
through 2007, and Checklist of species and hybrids, through  
2005. PDF formats. \$15.00

**Check List of named PCI species and cultivars CD, 2005.**

Lists species and registered cultivars and hybrids of PCI  
through 2005; CD, \$9.00.

**Welcome to the Beauty of Pacific Coast Iris CD, 2009.**

A 15-minute presentation with a concise overview of PCN  
species, early hybridizers, Mitchell Award and Medal  
winners, gardens landscaped with PCIs, and culture tips.  
Ready to play for individuals or groups, \$9.00

### USERS GROUP ON YAHOO:

SPCNI has a users group site at

<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/PacificIris/>.

Members are encouraged to join this group, which provides  
a simple online way to ask questions about finding and  
growing PCIs among all members. To join this site, you  
must register with Yahoo, but do not need a Yahoo e-mail  
account. You may post photos here, check on scheduled  
activities, and contact other SPCNI members.

The SPCNI Website is still located at

<http://www.pacificcoastiris.org/>.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

		<b>Profit/Loss Statement 12/31/2010</b>
Profit/Loss statement	3	
		Income
Welcome to new members	3	Publications (all forms) 478
		Donations 77
President's Message	4	Dues 947
		Interest earned 21
From the Editor's desk	5	Seed Exchange Sales 533
		Trek 2010 Income 1,410
Growing and breeding PCIs Down Under		<b>Total Income \$3,466</b>
Mary Barrell	7	
Robyn Brader	8	Expenses
Heidi Blyth	10	Almanac Printing 944
Gwenda Harris	10	Almanac Postage 490
John Taylor	11	Other Postage 100
		L & P Fees 20
Where to get PCIs	13	Membership 40
		Mitchell Medal 44
2011 SPCNI Seed Exchange report	15	Office 44
		Other printing (CD) 157
Reports from 'outlying' members	16	Trek Expenses 1,007
		Web Server 194
Heidi Blyth seedlings	18	Web Domain Name 15
		<b>Total Expenses \$3,055</b>
John Taylor seedlings	19	
		<b>Net Income/Expense \$411</b>
Graham Spiers seedlings	20	

### Welcome to new members

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### Net Worth Report 12/31/2010

Savings Account	3,807.60
Checking Account	2,451.66
Memorial Account	3,502.05
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$9,761.31</b>

### CROWDED OUT

Brian Agron wrote us a piece about his 30 year long love affair with the Marin irises, but our concentration on the Southern Hemisphere in this edition means we have been unable to print it - we are holding it for the next Almanac. For a real treat, readers should go to the SPCNI website and follow the link to Brian's Youtube tribute to these irises, set to Vivaldi's Piccolo Concerto in C major.

# President's Message

Well, Friends and Fellow Members, (as usual) there's good news and there's bad news.

The good news is that a new Seed Exchange Chair has volunteered to replace the retiring Bob Sussman. She is Emma Elliott, partner with Truls Jensen in Wild Ginger Farm of Beavercreek, Oregon, and Pacific Coast Iris are one of their specialties. Emma has also been very active this year on SPCNI's Yahoo discussion group [PacificIris]. Be sure to collect lots of interesting seed (responsibly, of course) for the Exchange this summer so she'll get a good workout and be able offer a really exciting Exchange list in the fall.

More good news: our reluctant Executive Board has finally bit the bullet and voted to bring SPCNI's dues more into line with reality. Effective July 1, new and renewal memberships will be priced (in \$US) as follows:

Domestic, paper Almanac, one year \$15, three years \$40

Foreign, paper Almanac, one year \$18, three years \$48

Electronic Almanac, one year \$7, three years \$19.

This still doesn't quite cover the total cost of the Almanac to its subscribers, but funds from the Seed Exchange and publication sales will make up the difference.

I couldn't remember, and so I peeked at old Almanacs: it seems unbelievable that I could have been president of SPCNI for five years. It's been eventful. We've welcomed a new Editor, Gareth Winter, a new Secretary/Treasurer, Kathleen Sayce, and a new Seed Exchange Chair -- no, two! Bob Sussman and now Emma Elliott. We've added two positions to the society, Registrar/Recorder (Ken Walker) and Historian (Richard Richards). We've held two Treks and Ken has created three new CDs. And through it all we've had the sage guidance of Webmaster Steve Ayala and Vice President Mike Monninger, and the continuing thoughtful wisdom of my predecessor, Richard Richards. The bad news is, when I retire this summer and Bob Sussman takes over the 'hot seat', you're still stuck with me on the Executive Board..... That's okay, there's more to do.

Don't forget to let us know when you read about PCIs in local papers or magazines; we'd like to post such articles on our website. Have you found, or are you conducting, interesting new research? Did you discover a previously unreported hybrid in the wild? Do you have an itch to create an SPCNI page on Facebook? Thanks to decades of dedicated members, SPCNI is still alive, and doing well. But we can't do this without you, dear members. We need to hear from you, by letter, postcard, phone, or email. Send us your concerns, your wishes, your ideas, tell us what you would like to see in the Almanac for articles, on the website, for group meetings, treks, and other activities.

Get active!

My best to all of you,

Debby

## CORRECTION

In the last issue of the Almanac we credited the photograph of the nice blue *Iris tenax* on the last Trek to our hard working secretary Kathleen Sayce. The photographer was actually Kenneth Hixson. Our apologies to Ken for the misattribution.

# From the Editor's Desk

I feel I should have changed the heading for this Almanac – it should probably read ‘From under the Editor’s desk’.

It has been a turbulent few months in this part of the world. Late last year, just as the PCIs were starting to flower, the southern regions of our country were rocked by a large earthquake, which resulted in a lot of damage to buildings in Christchurch, New Zealand’s second largest city. Mercifully, there was no loss of life.

Then in February, after the PCI seed had been harvested, Christchurch was hit by a smaller, but much shallower earthquake, resulting in substantially more building damage, and the loss of hundreds of lives. You will be relieved to know that our members from the Canterbury region are all well.

The great earthquake off the coast of Japan, and the subsequent tsunami, are a further reminder of the turbulence of the region known as the Pacific Rim, where volcanoes and earthquakes abound. The west coast of the United States forms part of this gigantic ring of fire, and many PCI growers will be familiar with the feeling of the earth stuttering underneath their feet, and swinging and swaying alarmingly, and will join in sending our best wishes to all those affected by these events.

This issue we have concentrated on the efforts of New Zealand and Australian growers, and feature some interesting seedlings coming from the breeding programmes of some of these southern irisarians. I have been looking at the work of New Zealand’s doyen of iris breeders, the late Jean Stevens. Born in 1900, and breeding irises from her childhood, she is best known for her work among tall bearded irises, with some of her varieties being regarded as breakthroughs in their time. Her yellow amoena ‘Pinnacle’ was the first in its class, and one of the most popular irises of the early 1950s and her near-pink amoena ‘Sunset Snows’ lies behind the breeding of many of Barry Blyth’s showy bicolours and amoenas.

But Jean Stevens also bred many other kinds of irises, including PCIs. I have a copy of her breeding stud book from 1948-1949 and it lists 36 crosses she harvested from her ‘Innominata’ plants. Her 1950-51 catalogue had this to say about her hybrids.

*Since we first introduced the coloured forms of Iris innominata four years ago there has been a constant demand for more plants of these dainty and most desirable little irises.*

*We have now propagated four of the loveliest and most colourful seedlings by division and named them, so we can now offer them again. Orders can be filled only for autumn delivery.*

*Orders for collections will be filled as long as supplies of all varieties last. As these stocks are not large early ordering is advisable.*

*The innominata irises do not like lime, and must have good drainage. If drainage is really good they do excellently in heavy soil, but are easiest to grow in a medium to light soil.*

*Heavy soils would have sand added before planting. They should be given a position in full sun, and once established should not be disturbed. If the soil is dry when the plants are received it should be thoroughly wetted some hours before planting.*

*Plant firmly. After planting they should be given no more water as they dislike sodden soil. As the plants do not like to be out of the ground long, they are available only to New Zealand customers. All varieties are excellent for house decoration but are also very showy in the garden, an established clump producing many dozens of blooms. They flower from the end of August until mid-October.*

## SPRINGTIME

*A very dainty combination of palest ice blue standards and bright blue violet falls. The earliest to flower.  
9 inches. 5/-*

## COPPER GLOW

*A rich, frilled, copper red brown with broad petals. A lovely and most unusual colour and a true self. 12 inches.  
5/-*

## SYMPHONY

*A beautifully blended shade of rich lilac wine with some-what paler standards, and gold veining in the falls. The falls are very broad and well displayed. 12 inches. 5/-*

## ROYAL VIOLET

*Not so broad of petal as the other varieties but very lovely with its rich deep violet colour. 15 inches 5/-  
The collection of these four varieties for 17/6d, post free for cash with order.*

Jeans Stevens PCIs were used by other breeders in Australia and New Zealand, and seed from her varieties made its way back to California in the 1950s and 1960s to help establish the modern form.

Jean Stevens gardened in Wanganui, on the west coast of the North Island of New Zealand, where she and her husband Wally also played a large role in the growing and breeding of Australian and South African shrubs. Wally's Leucadendron hybrids are grown world-wide for the cut flower trade.

Just up the coast at New Plymouth our Society's member Bruce Kerr started growing PCIs relatively recently, entranced by their beauty after seeing them in another local garden. He came to PCIs through his love of other showy plants – he grew vireya Rhododendrons, Cattleya orchids and peonies in his suburban garden – rather than through the usual Iris Society route.

A lifelong gardener, retired teacher Bruce started growing with plants I sent him some years ago, and was an enthusiastic buyer of seed from the exchange and other growers. He planted out his front yard with lots of seedlings, and started a small scale competition with his neighbours, as they competed to grow the best seedlings.

Bruce had hoped to be able to write a small piece for this issue about his success with PCIs in his garden alongside Pukekura Park, but a painful battle with cancer, which he lost earlier this year, prevented him from contributing. His enthusiastic promotion of our favourite flower in his garden in the rich Taranaki volcanic soils created by that same Pacific ring of fire that has caused so much havoc recently will be missed.

I hope that in the coming months the world returns to a more settled state and we can get on with the serious business of growing Pacific Coast Irises.

All the best from the Shaky Isles, as Australians love to call New Zealand.

Gareth

# GROWING AND BREEDING PCIs DOWN UNDER

Mary Barrell is a keen iris grower based in Cambridge, in the northern half of the North Island. Although she claims to really be a TB fancier, she also has a soft spot for PCIs.

Just to make sure there is no misunderstanding here, I am a Tall Bearded Iris fan. I have been for close on 40 years.

Back in the days before the New Zealand government introduced very strict quarantine regulations and it was still possible to import rhizomes from America I did so - sometimes from Schreiners, sometimes from Keith Keppel and sometimes Joe Ghio.

In the back of Joe Ghio's catalogue he had these unknown irises called 'Pacificas'. They had intriguing descriptions but as they were not dormant or semi-dormant they could not be imported. However, unnamed seed could be purchased – so it was.



Some germinated, quite a lot did not. Some transplanted seedlings grew, most did not. The very tough survivors (which I still have) were so pretty. My eyes were opened to a new world of irises. A few years later I imported some more unnamed seed and had a bit more success growing them and the range of colours was stunning. At that stage I grew them in full sun but with bark mulch. A later trial in semi shade with bark mulch found a whole new meaning to fungal rot. I lost lots of plants.

At this stage in my new found love of PCIs Debby Cole (from Seattle) visited New Zealand and on the advice of a mutual friend she paid me a visit. She gave me much encouragement and a newfound appreciation of 'subtle' colouring. "Why don't you try hybridising?" she asked. Why not indeed? I had already tried my hand at hybridising tall bearded iris with a conspicuous lack of success but why let that stop me?

As all of my plants were from unnamed seed the first cross was an adventure and did not yield much in the way of interesting seedlings. In the following year or two some were better. Then an envelope arrived from Debby with some seed so those were raised and one was selected and registered as 'Debby's Peach' (photo). This was selected because of its rounded form and big half round yellow signal. At this stage I also registered several from the Joe Ghio seedlings because so many of the local irisarians had become interested in what was growing in my back yard. Now it was time to purchase some seed from SPCNI and expand my gene pool and this has been done a couple of times.

I have to admit that in the early days my attention to detail of parentages and crosses was minimal. It was, and still is quite often, a matter of walking around my seedling patch with pollen in one hand from an interesting seedling to find a parent plant that has compatible attributes or could be improved by my pollen addition. I still have little interest in line breeding and find that wide crosses can sometimes be very interesting, although there is also a higher likelihood of getting drab dogs. However, being a cautious person, I take care to do some crosses from each of the above styles of hybridising. I am happy to say my recording method is improving.

So now, although I am still a tall bearded fan when they are flowering, I love my cute little guys too.



'Debby's Peach', the starting point of much of Mary Barrell's PCI breeding in New Zealand.



One of Mary Barrell's more recent seedlings, showing the broad falls she is breeding for.

Robyn Brader, who has gardened in a wide variety of conditions in Australia reports on the ups and downs of growing Pacific Coast Iris Down Under.

I still remember when the first PCI I acquired from a nursery in Sydney flowered in my second garden in suburban Adelaide, South Australia way back in 1971. This was the year I first became seriously hooked on Iris species. It had been drawn to my attention in a booklet earlier that same year in a national women's magazine that one could have an iris, or one of the broad iris family in bloom every day of the year - if one played one's cards right. I have found that claim to be quite true over the 40 years that have elapsed since.

So it was that in spring that same year a very dainty and rather pretty peachy coloured iris with grassy leaves came out in the newly planted patch of irises that included a couple of dwarf bearded iris, a Louisiana hybrid and a couple of others I cannot recall. A couple of days later a similar yellow flower appeared right next to it. A more knowledgeable irisarian friend explained that two clones must have been intertwined when it was dug and sent to me. In any event I ended up with two for the price of one which was a good start - and ever since I've been very fond of these floriferous and generally easygoing irises.

The following year I moved with my then spouse and a new baby to a small property in the Adelaide Hills where I grew a few more of these irises from seed acquired from SIGNA that were all either species or very closely allied to them. The seedlings came up easily enough and, upon advice, were planted when they had four leaves in early spring under some tall eucalyptus trees (the ones Aussies call 'Gum Trees'). I vaguely remember names like '*tenax x gormanii*'. Purple and mauve ones with interesting veins were soon flowering happily under the eaves at the top of the front lawn. There were several gold and creamy lemon flowered seedlings that grew and flowered well under the trees out back too. Even then they were among my favourites as I've always tended to prefer smaller plants.

Later I tried some named hybrids from a nursery in Victoria that I visited a couple of times with varying degrees of success. Some faded away after a couple of years due to the harsh drought years around those times. Back then the right time to move mature plants hadn't been quite settled upon which caused some losses too especially with plants sold by mail order. This Victorian nursery had acquired a large box of seed from Dan Hargraves, a highly regarded hybridizer who had become too old and infirm to continue his valuable work. I believe there may well be still some of their descendants in PCIs grown in parts of the country to the present day. One nursery in South Australia that took them on for a time named their hybrids after country towns in that state.

By the 1990s I had remarried and was living in a small town named Yackandandah in North East Victoria over 500 miles away. There I grew a few more PCIs including a couple of forms of *Iris douglasiana* and *I. innominata* plus a few more named clones. The seedlings I raised had multiplied and were flowering well during the three years we spent there. Most were close to the species though there was no urge to have a go at some hybridizing as the older narrow forms still appealed to me most. At short notice my garden was uprooted yet again to the northern side of the Blue Mountains behind Sydney. By this time I had been a member of the SPCNI for quite some time for even if I wasn't growing very many PCIs I still loved reading about them and admiring photos of them.

The same year we moved north, 1995, we visited California in the northern spring and I was excited to see these irises (mostly mauve) growing wild along the roadsides as we drove towards San Francisco. During our stay with my penfriend Michael Tallman in the hills out of Santa Rosa we visited Fort Ross on the coast where we saw more wild irises in flower. Their name 'Pacific Coast Iris' certainly seemed apt. They were out in flower in the Berkeley University Botanical gardens too - both the 'clumpers' which I think may have been *I. tenax*, and some like *I. macrosiphon* growing in the serpentine garden consisting of a rocky bed of shale. These had an intriguing haphazard manner of growth with odd fans sprouting out here and there. Along the path on the way to the exit was a fine leafed clump of a particularly fine deep pink form of *I. innominata*. I took a very nice photo of this that the local photographic studio I used subsequently later damaged beyond repair when I ordered an enlargement. The original was lost too which was disappointing.

The six years were spent gardening on a hillside at Bowen Mountain New South Wales in a rain shadow. A limited water supply consisting of two small rainwater tanks made gardening challenging to say the least. There, the Hawkesbury Sandstone soil (regarded as among the poorest on the planet), dry winters and often heavy summer rains that began in January made gardening different to what I had experienced. I raised a few PCI seedlings along the way that rewarded me with a few flowers but in my heart I knew this wasn't ever going to be good iris country.

When my spouse retired in late 2001 we moved south again near our previous home in Yackandandah to 12 acres six km down a country lane. Nine years later there are some well established PCIs around the garden but not as many as I would have liked. They have taken much longer to become well established than we would have liked due to a prolonged and very severe drought and other factors. It took a long time to provide some shade and protection on what was a bare exposed field. However the PCIs have mostly thrived. Volunteer seedlings that occasionally self-sow have thrived. Some of the more recently acquired varieties from 'Sunshine and Dirt' nursery owned by Heidi Blyth near Melbourne have broadened the range of colours. Sadly this nursery has since closed down due to ill health. Heidi's hybrids have helped give PCIs a new lease of life in south-eastern regions which is pleasing to see. The general public is showing more interest as now some are appearing on the mainstream garden market from time to time. They are grown and sold in pots while in flower which is not entirely satisfactory as their requirements are often not spelt out properly.

Among the ones I am currently growing a couple have stood out. One is an older hybrid named 'Blue Gown' from a general nursery that has proved to be almost indestructible. Its many flowers are more mauve than blue with quite poor substance but it still has lots of charm and is a most reliable performer. A peachy modern looking seedling with a burgundy zone on the falls has made quite a large patch in the gravel at the edge of the front rock garden. It seems impervious to rain such as the many deluges of the past year or so after putting up with long, hot dry spells during many summers past. If it has a fault it is that it sometimes struggles to open properly. I suspect it could be a little bit 'overbred'. Heidi's introductions have mostly survived though I now wish I had acquired more. Growing more from seed from different sources would seem to be the obvious answer. A few health issues over the past year or so have meant time outdoors has been somewhat limited. I am still resolved to keep trying with these lovely irises that by and large, in my experience, find Australia an agreeable place in which to grow.



Some of Australian grower Robyn Brader's PCI seedlings, cultivated in the various gardens she has made in a number of locations around Australia.

Australian breeder Heidi Blyth has been unwell, and was unable to provide us with a detailed article on her PCI breeding, but forwarded the following notes.

The plants I got originally were from an older iris friend called Stan Lott, who had been playing around with hybridizing PCIs in his garden. His would have been a mix over the years from a handful of people playing with PCIs in Victoria. Since then, I have added plants from Jan Sparks (also from Victoria) and Joe Ghio and from seed and plants that I've picked up here and there. I've only been crossing with strong growing varieties which seems to have had a major impact on the strength of the seedlings - I've lost about two out of 1000. We have had good rain this year which has helped and may be the real reason they have done so well. They seem to do really well in the heavier soil and tolerate being overgrown with weeds now and then, really well.



Another great seedling from Heidi Blyth's breeding programme in Australia.

Gwenda Harris gardens on the drier lands of the eastern side of the South Island, in North Otago and South Canterbury, one of a family of iris lovers and growers. Her garden was too far south to be badly affected by the Christchurch earthquake.

New Zealand's iris guru, the late Frances Love used to say that Pacific Coast Irises (PCIs) were the easiest irises to grow – just fling some seed into the garden and they are away. During fifteen something years of seriously growing PCIs my experience is somewhat different. Growing them from seed for the Otepopo Garden Nursery in inland North Otago, in New Zealand's South Island, losses were estimated at 80%. A move to Hampden on the North Otago coast and the Maritima Mail Order Nursery brought far more success. On a relatively sandy soil close to a former pine plantation PCIs grew amazingly well, especially at the top of steepish slopes and even on the cliff edge where I tried *Iris douglasiana* hybrids after having seen them on the Monterey coast. These plants had virtually no attention except for admiration and occasional grass clipping.

Now in a little cottage on a quarter of an acre in Waimate the struggle to get PCIs established has resumed. The area chosen is about three metres wide between an *Escallonia* shrub, a big *Photinia* tree and backed by a *Lonicera nitida* hedge in part shade. Companion plants are doing well. It was given the best preparation, even a bale of peat (the use of which is not normally approved), and heavy mulching with pine needles, now bark mulch having chatted to Gareth Winter. Still most of the PCIs brown off and die.

Across the garden in a sunnier site under a conifer they are doing well and I hope for some blooms this year. PCIs are much loved for their attractive habit, colourful flowers and pickability, even for the Show Bench. I long to establish a collection of species again. There is a nice little clump of *I. chrysophylla* and some seeds in, but I do regret losing the charming pinkish *I. tenax* that grew so well at Maritima.

My sister, Judith Neilson, has been growing PCIs for a similar length of time. She started on limestone country planting in the shade as advised by her mentor, the late Heather Collins. They died, but she tried again in a sunnier site and has been growing them successfully ever since. Now at Waihou Downs, just through the Waimate Gorge, she has swathes of PCIs with narcissi and hellebores under silver birches in a sunny border. They grow well, flower well and seed well. They are fed autumn and spring with Nitrophoska Blue and on Debby Cole's suggestion, a handful of Osmocote in the autumn. Now and then they are mulched with pine needles.

When I had my colours done in some far off juvenile phase, the diagnosis was 'autumn' so it is not surprising that the subtle colours are preferred - plums and burgundies, russets and browns, lime and lemon, rose and pewter enhanced with as many blues as can be accommodated and a delicious clump or two of white or cream. No doubles, no frills or ruffles, but the fall markings are important. As an occasional painter the joy of attempting to replicate the colours and veining of PCIs, siberians and *I. unguicularis* is only dampened by the enormous difficulty in getting it right and of course in growing and flowering the model.

While I might blame the lurid *Photinia* (which being in the *Rosaceae* family probably likes lime) and suspect that it sends messages like "while I will tolerate quieter plants like rhododendrons, Japanese anemones, hellebores and species geraniums at my feet I will not tolerate competition from the exquisitely coloured PCIs. Begone!" it is acknowledged that the grower must take responsibility. Even more than acid soil, checking for white roots before transplanting, keeping them moist during the process, not watering when the foliage is hot, the one thing PCIs seem to need most is sharp drainage and lots of it.

## JOHN TAYLOR'S EXPERIENCES WITH GROWING AND BREEDING PACIFIC COAST NATIVE IRIS IN NSW, AUSTRALIA.

by GRAEME GROSVENOR

John and I have been growing Pacific Coast Native Iris (PCNI) for well over 30 years with varying degrees of success. The original plants came via Barry Blyth from Dan Hargraves stock and they grew moderately well but were short lived in the humid Sydney climate on the east coast of Australia. They set seed regularly without any help from us and hence we were able to maintain some plants in the garden over many years. At that time John was involved in hybridising Louisiana iris and my main interest was in tall bearded iris. My wife Helen did some hybridising and produced some nice flowers.

In 1989 we purchased the Hill View property in central western NSW to grow TB stock for our nursery, Rainbow Ridge. Some PCNIs found their way into the garden established at Hill View. While they performed better than in Sydney the PCNIs were not given the care and attention they deserved. The climate was much more agreeable with cold, frosty winters and hot dry summers but we were living in Sydney and gardening at Hill View on weekends. Time was always a problem and years of drought reduced our planting substantially yet still the PCNIs survived.

It was always our intention to retire to Hill View but circumstances changed that. John was due to retire in 2005 but my daughter Sharon and her family expressed interest in taking over the nursery at Hill View. We were delighted at this and so she moved in to Hill View and John and I purchased 15 acres at nearby Millthorpe. At 960 metres above sea level, Millthorpe had a much higher altitude and a much colder climate - very heavy frosts and some snow in winter, low humidity and warm, dry summers and four distinct seasons.

The PCNIs came with us to Millthorpe, including some seedlings grown from seed obtained from Joe Ghio, the world leader in developing these iris, and the better quality seedlings from our own breeding. After the move to Millthorpe we also supplemented our stock with seedlings from Heidi Blyth to add some additional variety.

Prior to the move to Millthorpe we had no information on how the PCNIs would perform at altitude but can now readily testify to the fact that our conditions are excellent. John was no longer hybridising Louisiana iris and when we found the PCNIs to be relishing the climate he took up the challenge of hybridising these beauties.

The PCNIs were planted in various different locations over the 15 acres and we have found that those in full sun have done best, far surpassing those in semi shade or shaded positions. They are in soil with a pH of around 6.5 with some compost added and water provided by drip irrigation. Our only losses seem to be the result of over watering in the odd positions where drainage is less than perfect. Overall, from our limited experience we have concluded that PCNIs planted in an acid soil that is well drained and in an open sunny position will do well in our climate and elevation as long as watering is controlled.

John's approach to hybridising has become planned and rigorous. Bee pods set easily on the PCNIs and while some nice flowers result it is very noticeable that the quality has improved dramatically with better selection of parents. As was his experience with Louisianas, John's interest has been to develop flowers with wide, full rounded form and ruffled petals. He is also looking for colour breaks and combinations while always having an eye on good garden habits.

I have maintained for many years that PCNIs are the most desirable garden subjects of all the iris family and am delighted that John is of the same opinion and has taken to hybridising them with enthusiasm now that we have perfect or near perfect growing and climatic conditions. Results, so far, have been very rewarding and John entered four seedlings in the trial garden of the NSW Region. In 2009, a Taylor PCNI was judged Champion Beardless Spike and another PCNI seedling was judged Champion Collection at the NSW Region Show. In 2010 a PCNI seedling was judged Champion Beardless Spike and another seedling judged Champion Vase. His seedling A29 was awarded the Loveridge Medallion, for best beardless iris, in the NSW Region Trial Garden in 2010. The seedlings which flowered for the first time in 2010 were wonderful to see and admired by all who saw them in the garden and on the show bench.



Two more of John Taylor's wonderful seedlings.

# Where to get PCIs

Below is a list of nurseries that offer species, hybrids, or seeds of PCIs

Firstly for seeds, go to [www.cnplx.info](http://www.cnplx.info), and search for 'Iris'—this will produce a list of suppliers of native iris seeds or plants. The list is long, and most will offer *Iris douglasiana*, and some PCI seedlings, and unnamed hybrids. Of course our own SPCNI extensive seed list, produced annually in the Fall issue, is a valuable source of seeds of both hybrids and species.

The balance of this list is of nurseries or seed suppliers that offer more than three species, or ten registered hybrids. If you know of nurseries that should be added, please contact the SPCNI secretary.

## California

**Bay View Gardens**, 1201 Bay St, Santa Cruz CA 95060, tel 831-423-3656; catalog \$2.00; PCI hybrids, and other iris groups.

**Elkhorn Native Plant Nursery**, 1957B Hwy One, Moss Landing, CA 95039, tel 831-763-1207; [www.elkhornnursery.com](http://www.elkhornnursery.com); several PCI species.

**Larner Seeds**, PO Box 407, 235 Grove Rd, Bolinas CA 94924; tel 415-868-9407; [www.larnerseeds.com](http://www.larnerseeds.com); online catalog, seeds only, *I. douglasiana*.

**Las Pilitas Nursery**, two locations: 3232 Las Pilitas Rd, Santa Margarita, CA 93453, tel 805-438-5992; 8331 Nelson Way, Escondido CA 92026, tel 760-749-5930; [www.laspiliatas.com](http://www.laspiliatas.com); online catalog, wholesale and retail; several PCI species and hybrids.

**Matilija Nursery**, 8225 Waters Rd, Moorpark CA 93021, tel 805-523-8604; [www.matilijanursery.com](http://www.matilijanursery.com); no online catalog, several PCI species and hybrids.

**Theodore Payne Foundation**, 10459 Tuxford St, Sun Valley, CA 91352, tel 818-768-1802; [www.theodorepayne.org](http://www.theodorepayne.org); several PCI species.

**Tree of Life Nursery**, 33201 Ortega Hwy, or PO Box 635, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675, tel 949-728-0685; [www.californianativeplants.com](http://www.californianativeplants.com); several PCI species.

**Yerba Buena Nursery**, 195000 Skyline Blvd [40 Langley Hill Rd], Woodside, CA 94062; [www.yerbabuenanursery.com](http://www.yerbabuenanursery.com); more than 10 PCI species and hybrids.

## Oregon

**Wild Ginger Farm**, 24000 S Schuebel School Rd, Beavercreek OR 97004; tel 503-632-2338; [www.wildgingerfarm.com](http://www.wildgingerfarm.com); online catalog, several PCI species and hybrids.

**Wildwood Gardens**, 33326 S Dickey Prairie Rd, Molalla OR 97038; tel 503-829-3102; [www.wildwoodgardens.net](http://www.wildwoodgardens.net); online catalog and ordering. For mail order, PO Box 250, Molalla, OR 97038-0250, catalog \$5.00; PCIs and Cal-Sibs.

## Washington

**Aitken's Salmon Creek Gardens**, 608 NW 119th St, Vancouver WA 98685, tel 360-573-4472; [www.flowerfantasy.net](http://www.flowerfantasy.net); online catalog, PCI hybrids, and many other groups.

**Far Reaches Farm**, 1818 Hastings Rd, Port Townsend, WA 98368, tel 360-385-5114; [www.farreachesfarm.net](http://www.farreachesfarm.net); online catalog, 5 PCI.

**Leonine Iris**, 7051 S 126th St, Seattle WA 98178-4337, tel 206-772-2780; [www.leonineiris.com](http://www.leonineiris.com); online catalog, PCI hybrids, and many other groups.

## British Columbia

**Fraser's Thimble Farms**, 175 Arbutus Rd, Salt Spring Island, V8K 1A3, British Columbia, Canada, tel 250-537-5788; [www.thimblefarms.com](http://www.thimblefarms.com); online catalog and ordering, 4 PCI species.

**Pacific Rim Native Plant Nursery**, 43356 Hillkeep Place, Chilliwack, BC V2R 4A4, Canada; visits by appointment only; tel 604-792-9279; [www.hillkeep.ca](http://www.hillkeep.ca); online catalog and ordering.

## International

**Aulden Farm**, Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 0JT, England, tel 01568 720129; [www.auldenfarm.co.uk/pacificcoastiris.html](http://www.auldenfarm.co.uk/pacificcoastiris.html); several PCI seedlings.

**Broadleigh Gardens**, Barr House, Bishop Hull, Taunton, Somerset TA4 1AE, England. Broadleigh hybrids; catalog - self-addressed, stamped envelope. <http://www.broadleighbulbs.co.uk>

**Cascadia Iris Garden**, PO Box 2520, Woodinville, WA 98072-2520, tel 425-770-5984; [www.cascadiairisgardens.com](http://www.cascadiairisgardens.com); online catalog, 13 PCIs, also Cal-Sibs.



**Broadleigh Gardens** have a range of their own varieties for sale to European gardeners, including 'Broadleigh Medusa' on the left, and 'Broadleigh Susan' on the right.

### SEED EXCHANGE

Bob Sussman, outgoing seed exchange chairman reports on his last seed distribution below. He asks that members think about donating seed from their gardens for this project, especially from named varieties. For many growers outside the western states, seed is the easiest way to obtain the latest genetics in modern PCIs – your help in supplying seed from modern varieties, or your own crosses from your garden would be very much appreciated



# 2011 seed exchange report

It's finally over! At the time of this article I'm still counting things up but we had about 25 or so orders going out to our members in the US, Japan, Canada, Germany, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Switzerland, France, and Spain. In the US we sent packets not only to California, Oregon and Washington but also to Texas and Pennsylvania. The number of individual seed packets sent out was somewhere around 550 which represents a lot of glue tasted by the Seed Exchange Chairperson.

As is always the case we ran out of named hybrids including seeds from some of my crosses. It has always been easier to collect large amounts of species than named hybrids and we need more of you to contribute seeds from your seedlings, crosses and named hybrids. Next year we're thinking of giving some advantage to those that send in seeds to exchange. If you need help with seed collecting or crossing there are plenty of people that can help you out - just email away.

Maybe for next year's Exchange we could get some crosses that the members might want to try? Talking of a surprise package, I've included a few pictures of the flowers from one of the crosses that many of you purchased. Crosses made in April/May/June will produce seeds for next year's Exchange. I want to thank Claire Patten who sent us seeds from her new iris which will be in next year's Exchange. She's now at the top of next year's seed "picking".

As was mentioned in the earlier Almanac, I will be leaving the job (non-paying) of Seed Exchange Chairperson. Another willing volunteer has stepped forward. Emma Elliot of Wild Ginger Farms in Oregon will be taking over these responsibilities. We welcome her and thank her for volunteering. Given the nature of her (and Truls Jensen's) business I am sure she'll do a very efficient job at getting out everyone's seed orders and cashing their checks, something the last SE person might have been a bit slow on.

As for me, I've very much enjoyed the personal relationships that I have gained as a result of this volunteer position much more than the high pay. Don't worry - I won't be far away as you can't get rid of me!

All the best in a new growing and flowering season,

Bob Sussman



Bob Sussman seedlings from the 2010 seed exchange  
left, PacRim x GD30; right, Pac x GD2

# Report from 'outlying' members

## - David Schmieder

At first, after receiving only a response from Dorothy Willot to my request last year for the fall issue of the Almanac, I questioned whether anything new was happening in this region. I had felt that way, after reviewing all my pictures taken last year during very unhelpful weather. Then I realized that some of us had expressed hopes for last year's PCI season in the Spring, 2010 issue, so I asked again for a line or whatever about anything they might think interesting. I asked if they were one of those reporting in Spring 2010 they would let any curious readers know if those hopes were met. The following reports were kindly submitted.

**Dorothy Willot, Beachwood, OH:** "All my irises have been very stressed by the heat and drought. I was not able to get much water to them, a lot still in pots, and I do not see any signs of irises trying to rebloom. All my PCNs died over the winter of 2008/2009 so I have nothing to report on them. The species that are doing well are *I. lactea*, *I. sintensii* var. *brandzae*, some *I. setosa* and some *I. spuria*."

**Susan Lambiris, Raleigh, NC:** "I had a rather disappointing bloom in 2010 -- possibly because my established iris bloomed very heavily the previous year and the new ones, of course, weren't established enough to bloom yet. The hot dry summer (not as hot or as dry as some people had, but hot and dry enough!) was somewhat stressful on the new iris but at least three new ones have survived and should be safe now. The ones that didn't survive either got root rot (a common problem for my transplants) or had very small root systems compared to their leaves, or both. When the weather cooled off I had a better chance to see exactly what had survived and that I can feel hopeful for this year! Sorry not to have more exciting news, but I'm actually quite pleased with the fact that so many of the new iris survived. Most of the time I'm lucky if one plant out of an order of six or seven lives! Best wishes to all."

**Al Bullock, northern VA:** "As I had mentioned spring, 2010 I have a dozen PCNI planted in the front bed. I believe every one of those bloomed during the 2010 season. The four remaining plants in the back yard also bloomed and were 'Canyon Snow'. I had good results from the seeds from the 2009-10 SPCNI seed exchange. I planted all the species I received except for one directly in the ground, in an outdoor area rich with recycled pro-mix and topsoil. Then later, in April, after I had filled 6" and 8" pots with Pro-mix (a sowing and seedling mix consisting of peat moss, vermiculite, perlite, with Mycorrhiza plus trace elements), I soaked the seed overnight and planted the remaining species and all the named variety seeds in the pots. The pots went outside to a stand on the deck. Seed germinated for all but two of the named varieties. I stuck the pots with seeds that didn't germinate in a raised bed in filtered shade, and have been hoping for germination this spring. The species seeds planted in the ground did not germinate. The only thing I can think is the three feet of snow in early February that year zapped the seeds. I had packed snow on top to retain moisture and protection, but I am not sure if this helped. No seeds that I had broadcast in fall 2009 for spring germination germinated - things like balloon flower, cups and saucers, mountain aster etc. Any success I had I have to attribute to Bob Sussman who sent me a list of things to do and double check. All the seedlings have been placed in the raised bed in filtered shade. Again I am looking forward to this year."

**David Schmieder, Concord, MA:** "After a very long, though not too severe, winter 2009-10 proceeded from flooding in February to a brief really hot spell in March, and then spring stayed cold and wet, most plants of all types here started their activities three or four weeks too early, only to slowly drift into generally poor performance (with a few exceptions). Some of the PCI seedlings that I so enjoyed in 2009 bloomed again, and there were a few new ones blooming, but frequent hard rain never allowed

those that flowered to last long enough for me to do much more than snap a few quick pictures. I had hoped to compare such things as plant habit and number of blooms from one year to the next, and try several crosses, but that will require better weather and better organization. At some point in June we began the longest hot and dry spell since we moved here in 1965, ending finally in September. Outdoor watering was very restricted. At least there were only a couple of severely humid spells, so that mildew was less. Hoping the PCI had appreciated that and were ready to grow, in fall I fertilized and watered them some, hoping to beef them up for this year.

I had no luck with my seeds ordered from the 2009-10 SPCNI seed exchange. After soaking and refrigerating the seeds, I planted them one seed to a cell along with some *I. pardancanda* in a 156 celled flat. Only two seeds germinated, and rodents ate those before I could set them out. I will hope for 2nd year germination, but am using large pots again for the seeds I am just now planting. I also plan to try swapping some plants with others as the real acid test for any durability my seedlings might have. No matter what the result, PCI seedlings are such great fun.

Late in October we were treated to a visit from Debby Cole, as she has relatives in our area. She came bearing a most welcome gift of her 'Periwinkle Persian'. I split the piece into two locations, one on either side of our driveway. In the picture below, taken March 3, you can see that they were well protected from the spells of subzero (F) weather this winter. Already less than two weeks later, the snow is gone there by the house and is down to three feet deep on the other side. The plant now exposed by the house still looks good, and I am looking forward to its survival and eventual blooming, with hand pollinated pods if I am lucky.

Another PCI contact of interest, in February, was a note from Frank Foster about his plans to breed PCIs again. His request for information about varieties that tolerate harsh climates best was great to see, even though my knowledge from personal observation is severely limited. I did offer a few seeds and eventually plants of some of my survivors however, and hope he makes full use of the SPCNI site and blog. His success would certainly be applauded by all of us 'outlying' members of SPCNI. Note: Frank is now gardening in Salem, OR, which is not a particular hardship zone, but he told Debby Cole last year that he was planning to hybridize CalSibs, and must be going for extra cold-hardiness.



# Heidi Blyth's new seedlings



# John Taylor's fabulous seedlings



## More southern hemisphere beauties



Seedlings from Australian breeder Graham Spiers

Top row, from left: 'Oh Boy Owen', and 'Our Dream of Gold'.

Second row, from left: 'Eggs on Toast' and 'Oh Boy Mason'.

Third row, from left: Two seedlings, No A 23 and No C 4, possible future registrations