

# Pacific Iris

Almanac of the Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris



# Sydney B. Mitchell Medal

## 2014



The Sydney B. Mitchell Medal is the American Iris Society's highest award devoted to only Pacific Coast Iris and named in honour of Sydney B. Mitchell. As well as being an academic and educator, Mitchell was a renowned plant breeder, perhaps best remembered for his work on yellow tall bearded irises, and his collaboration with William Mohr. However, he was also very interested in the native irises of the West Coast and grew large numbers of them in his garden.

### WINNER

RODEO GULCH (Joseph Ghio)

### RUNNERS-UP:

BUBBLE WRAP (Joseph Ghio)

EYE CATCHING (Joseph Ghio)

PERIWINKLE PERSIAN (Deborah Cole)

PINOLE PRINCE (Vernon Wood by Terri Hudson)



# Pacific Iris, Almanac of the Society Fall 2014

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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.

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Send membership renewals or inquiries to the AIS Membership Secretary, or enroll on line at: <http://www.irises.org/member.htm>.

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Check List of named PCI species and cultivars, 2005  
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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

All three volumes , \$20.00

**Diseases of the Pacific Coast Iris**

Lewis & Adele Lawyer, 1986. Fall 1986 Almanac, 22 pages,  
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includes the following indices: author, subject, species, hybrids, \$4.00, or download PDF on the SPCNI website for free.

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

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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.

## This issue's cover

The cover of this issue is taken from an illustration first published in 'The Garden -An illustrated weekly journal of horticulture in all its branches,' an English gardening magazine, 1875-1900, on January 1, 1898.

The article the cover is attached to is on pages 7-8, and tells of the experiences of English gardeners with what were then exotic members of the iris family.

The two irises chosen to illustrate the story were the PCI *Iris tenax*, and the Louisianan Copper Iris, *I. cuprea*, now correctly known as *I. fulva*.

It is interesting to read how the author described *Iris douglasiana* as one of the most vigorous of the non-bearded irises he grew, extolling the delights of the thirty or forty blooms he was getting from his clump.

It is also interesting to read of the troubles he experienced trying to grow what he called *I. californica*, a synonym for the plant we now call *Iris macrosiphon*. This is a very widespread species in the Californian central coastal ranges, and can be found in many forms. Although found mainly in lavender or lilac-purple shades in Marin County, where it was originally described, elsewhere local populations can be found in colours ranging from white through to yellow.



*Iris macrosiphon*

*Photograph : Steve Ayala*



# President's Message

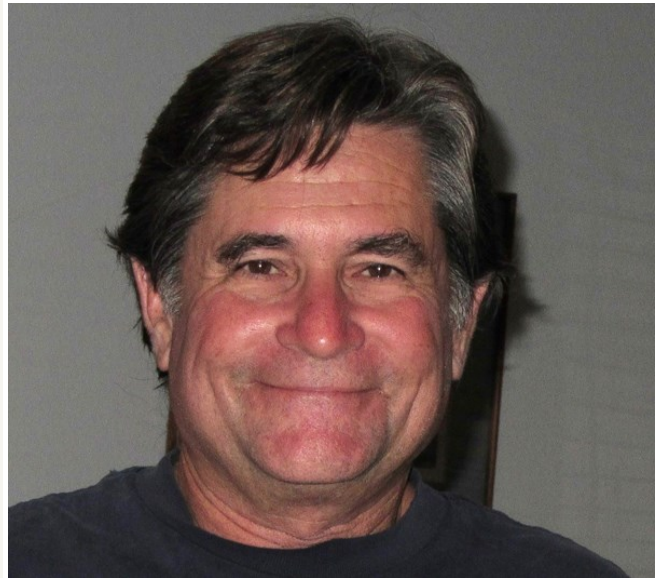
More and more people seem to be growing and enjoying Pacific Coast Irises in their gardens around the world. Those of us in the northern hemisphere certainly enjoy seeing the beautiful irises being grown in New Zealand and Australia, and then being posted to social media sites while we're in fall or winter. Indeed the term Pacific Coast Iris may have a new meaning!

Organization wise, things seem to be pretty stable with no big announcements and the American Iris Society meeting coming up this May, in Oregon.

On somewhat of an interesting iris growing note, we in Southern California have had a devil of a time growing Pacific Coast Irises because of our extended years of drought, which we hope will soon come to an end. While Pacific Coast Irises are relatively low water users, they do need some water or irrigation. In most gardens if there isn't sufficient rain the irrigation system is turned on. In a nursery situation things are similar, requiring more irrigation to compensate for the low rainfall.

In a nursery situation things are a little different during a drought, especially a prolonged one. Many agricultural businesses tend to use well water to supplement the meager rainfall. Less rain results in more well water being used and the more well water being used results in the quality of the well water getting increasingly worse because the concentrations of both salts and chlorides keeps rising. In turn, this causes more damage to Mr Bob's Pacific Coast Iris crop. Over the past few years (this last year being the worst) we've lost large numbers of Pacific Coast Irises.

Pacific Coast Irises do appear to be adaptive by careful selection over several generations. Not to say that eventually a given Pacific Coast Iris will adapt to a different environment, but rather when environmental factors change several Pacific Coast Iris varieties may not survive but some will.



Moreover, an above average percentage of the seedlings from the surviving irises will survive in the new environment. In my particular case we lost most of our iris varieties due to the high and toxic mineral content of the well water.

As you'd expect, as you try to grow Pacific Coast Irises where the environment differs greatly from their natural range, the fewer you can grow. In the nursery we have found that, while most Pacific Coast Iris struggle with the terrible irrigation water, some actually flourish. Many of those that survived are pretty nice looking too and we'll do our crosses with these.

Best of luck with your Pacific Coast Iris growing - it can be a frustrating challenge or an exhilarating madness.

Bob

# from the editor's desk

Dear fellow PCIrisarians

I hope all is going well in the iris patch for you. It is spring in the southern hemisphere, and we have had a mild winter followed by an old fashioned cool early spring and a windy late spring, our equinoctial gales being frequent and ferocious. It has made for a challenging time in the PCI seedling bed, with late frosts followed by heavy gales leading to lots of stem failure.

It has made the discussion of the degree of cold that PCIs can withstand that took place in the SPCNI group very interesting and relevant, and much of the information garnered there will be found in the article on pages 8-11. It will be interesting to hear from any others of you who garden away from PCI central in coastal California.

We have two different people's accounts of growing in the cold (and warmth) of Europe; one an old article from William Robinson's well-regarded horticulture magazine, "The Garden—Illustrated weekly journal of Horticulture in all its Branches", while the other is from Jan Jacobsen, an iris lover who shifted from the chilly climes of Denmark to the more salubrious surroundings of sunny Spain. Both have interesting tales to tell of the struggles of growing PCIs outside their natural range.

As you might expect from someone whose professional life is spent inside a collecting archive, I am interested in the history of iris cultivation, so I was pleased to hear that the gurus of iris history, the good people over at the Historic Iris Preservation Society (HIPS) are interested in an article on the background of our favourite plants. I am unaware of any old named varieties floating around in horticulture in New Zealand, but I know there are some in the United States, and I suspect there are others in Great Britain, so it is an area that will certainly reward further study. Hopefully we will be able to report on progress in this matter in upcoming issues.

As part of thinking about the history of PCIs I examined the various winners of the Mitchell Medal, and have placed some photographs of winners over the years. The first three winners were 'Ojai', registered by Lee Walker in 1959, 'Amiguita', registered by Eric Nies in 1947, and 'Native Warrior', registered by R. Phillips in 1970, winners in 1973, 1974 and 1975 respectively.

It is very instructive to look at the winners of recent years and see the enormous strides that have taken place in the evolution of garden PCIs. The colour range has increased, the size of the petals has also expanded, and the iridescence that Robert Pries writes about on pages 17-18 has also come to the fore. Just look at the 2011 joint winner, Joe Ghio's 'Blue Plate Special' to see what I am talking about.



*'Blue Plate Special' from the SPCNI CD*

If you garden in the Southern Hemisphere, I hope the weather is better at your place than mine—if you garden in the north, do not forget to get those seeds saved for the exchange.

Gareth Winter



# The GARDEN.

No. 1363.—Vol. LIII.]

[JANUARY 1, 1898.

## Some Californian irises

*Iris tenax*, figured in the plate, may, I think, be taken as the brightest and most highly coloured representative of those Californian irises which can be in any sense described as having lilac flowers. *I. cuprea* (the specific name *fulva* appears to have the right of primogeniture) is from the gardening point of view, absolutely *sui generis* [unique] in relation to its own family, for there is no other iris producing flowers of the same colour or anything like it, while the spreading segments appear to bring it closer to a Morea than any other species indigenous to the northern hemisphere.

The subject of Californian irises has within the last year or two excited some interest among the cultivators of hardy flowers, and to this have contributed not only the intrinsic beauty of the flowers themselves – many of them being quite distinct in colouring as well as in habit from any of the apogons hitherto commonly in cultivation – but also the confusion of the nomenclature, and perhaps I may add also the exceptional difficulty which has been found not so much in growing as in establishing certain of the species.

With regard to the nomenclature, we are, I think, beginning to see the daylight. The American botanists have recently revised and multiplied the species, and the confusion (if any) which may still exist is confined to one or two kinds at the outside. I may, perhaps, add that the plant from which the accom-

panying portrait of *I. tenax* was taken holds a certificate from Mr Baker as being identical to the specimens at Kew herbarium and as answering to his own description of the same (“Iridae”, p. 7)

Of the culture of Californian irises it is unnecessary to say much, for the whole matter has been discussed in the current volume of this journal. Mr Purdy in his article enumerates nine species (*I. longipetala*, *I. douglasiana*, *I. macrosiphon*, *I. missouriensis*, *I. tenax*, *I. bracteata*, *I. watsoni*, and *I. purdyi*) as being strictly Californian, and he alludes incidentally to two more, *I. parishii* and *I. californica*. Of these, the four last-named were not identified or admitted as species at the time of the publication of Mr Baker’s “Iridae,” and they are not alluded to in that work. Of the eleven species, *I. watsoni* (seemingly allied to *I. longipetala*) and *I. parishii* (recently separated from *I. missouriensis*) are not probably in cultivation in Europe – at any rate, under these names; but of the remaining nine I believe I may say that eight are growing here. *I. longipetala* and *I. missouriensis* (syn. *I. tolemana*), though these last two are frequently offered in catalogues as though they were distinct species, are pretty well known, and the latter was figured in THE GARDEN vol I., p 18.

*I. douglasiana* is less common, I believe, in European gardens, but it is nevertheless one of the most vigorous apogons I possess, and my plant is now (June 3) expanding some thirty or forty blooms simultaneously.



This, too, was figured in THE GARDEN Vol 1, p 272, and it is satisfactory to know that the plant figured is now admitted all round to be the true species.

*I. purdyi* – I am disposed to think that the strange and interesting dwarf Iris which originally reached me as *I. douglasiana* is identical with the plant now named as *I. purdyi*. I should have said I had little or no doubt of this, but my plant is certainly extremely like the woodcut of Herr Max Leichtlin's plant given in THE GARDEN vol lii., p. 126, and it will be noted that he has found distinct botanical differences between his own plant and the dried specimens of *I. purdyi*.

*I. macrosiphon* – I have an Iris which has been named for me by Mr Baker as a form of the above. It has not flowered this year, and I was away from home when it came into bloom last, but it is said to be slightly deeper in colour (yellow) than the last named.'

*I. bracteata* - This has come into bloom for the first time on the day I write (June 3). There being only one flower, I have not the heart to cut it and send it to Mr Baker, but as far as I can trust my own botanical knowledge, it corresponds with the description ("Iridae", p. 7), and it certainly answers to Mr Purdy's description of this Iris. It is of a pale though genuine yellow, much deeper towards the claw, finely reticulated with purple veins. It is by far the best yellow Iris I have seen among the North American species.

None of the Irises above named appear to present any insuperable difficulties in establishing, though, no doubt, much care should be taken in moving the three latter, and the operation if done at all should take place in the spring. With *I. tenax*, *I. hartwegi*, and *I. californica*, however, *c'est tout autre chose* [it is completely different]. So far as my experience goes, the only way to establish them is to plant them in pots (when well established) after removing the crocks, and subsequently to break the pots in the ground, though this latter operation must be done with great care and caution.

The portrait of *I. tenax* speaks for itself, and I have succeeded in getting *I. hartwegi* to take hold in the



*Iris bracteata*,  
*Curtis Botanical Magazine*, 1915

same way, but it has not yet bloomed. The plant, however, has been exhibited by Messrs Wallace and Co of Colchester, at the Temple show. Apart from its rarity and interest, it is a beautiful little dwarf Iris with pale yellow flowers and well worth growing. With the species named by Herr Max Leichtlin *I. californica* I have hitherto persistently and consistently failed. I have still one plant (out of six apparently strong and healthy ones received about two months ago) maintaining a doubtful struggle for life, but already, I fear, *mors atra caput tristi circumvolat umbra* [death flies about its head with a dark shadow] – I feel sure it is doomed. My friend Mr Ewbank, however, tells me he has several plants of this established and blooming well. There is evidently difficulty in getting these things to travel even short distances, and the difficulty of importing them alive from their native home is *a fortiori* [it follows logically] still greater. About six weeks ago Mr Purdy was so kind as to send me from California a plant of one of the yellow varieties (probably *I. californica*) but to borrow the words of King Richard III (though in no truculent sense) 'I found it sleeping and I shall leave it (or at any rate it will leave me) as I found it.' I have not yet thrown it away, but I have no hope of its starting...

# How do PCIs go in the cold?

Martin Page has been revising the Iris section in the Royal Horticultural Society's *A-Z Encyclopaedia of Garden Plants* and contacted the SPCNI for a little information on cold hardiness in Pacific Coast Irises. Some of our members responded with very useful information and Editor Gareth Winter has collated those replies.

Diane Whitehead, from Victoria, B.C., Canada said she gardened in an area in a cool Mediterranean climate with mild dry summers, and mild rainy winters. She said she lives on a hill between a lake and the ocean and has excellent drainage of both rain and cold air. Her usual winter temperature is between +5 and -3 degrees C, but every decade or so she experiences a cold spell of -8, and once it was -12.

She reported she has never noticed any iris deaths due to cold but said she thought the extent of coldness was not the only factor - the timing of cold spells could make a difference.

She thought that as PCIs produce new foliage in the winter the new foliage would be vulnerable to frost. She also said that if the new foliage is killed by cold, it may not kill the plant because it usually still has old foliage, unless it has been trimmed off.

Diane has read that gardeners in the U.K. have to contend with late frosts in the spring, after plants have started into growth but cannot recall that ever happening to her plants. She pointed out that her plants are almost all ones she has grown from seed, and some are the single survivor from perhaps a dozen or more siblings if the seeds came from California. She has

had only two named varieties survive - 'Pacific Rim' and 'Big Money'.

Arthur Goodwin, who gardens in western Denver Colorado (USDA zone 5b), reported that he has had some success growing a few PCIs in Denver after previously living in Northern California where he grew many. He found that in Denver, the typical cold winter temperatures were lethal to PCIs unless a lot was done to help them. Planting them in the open in raised beds, mortality usually approached 100% (with one major exception - more below). However, by planting them on south side of house, right

up next to the concrete foundation, and heavily mulching (about a foot of airy materials like leaves covered by some black plastic - he rolled the mulch back a few times during warm winter days to give their bed a bit of water though) he was able to raise these with some success.



'Pacific Rim' is one of few named varieties to flourish in Diane Whitehead's garden. Photo: Wild Ginger Farm

Her maritime climate doesn't gradually get colder; in fact sometimes there is a sudden cold spell. The most notable was one year about 1954 when none of the deciduous trees had dropped their leaves. They all froze and the trees retained dead brown leaves throughout the winter.

Over three winters this arrangement saw:

1) first winter, coldest and with most snow cover (which probably helped to insulate bed) - zero mortality of the 12 varieties planted here:

2) second winter, warmest of three winters, 16 of 18 PCIs came through fine - the two that died were both new plantings in previous year and did not do well even in summer), and

3) third year, many very cold snaps, but little snow - lost 11 of 26 PCIs - with all of the losses from the edge of the bed farthest from the house). He said it showed PCIs can be grown Denver, but only with a fair amount of extra care.

The one variety that came through all three years planted in the open in the center of the yard (on a little hump in the middle of a raised bed) was Will Plotner's 2010 Mitchell Award Winner 'Wild Survivor' which he mulched each year. He had two clumps, one in an open bed in center of yard and one in the main PCI bed, in the outer row furthest from house. Both clumps did well, blooming each year and with clump increasing in size each year (although it was not as vigorous as some of the PCIs right next to the house).



*Will Plotner's lovely little 'Wild Survivor' has lived up to its name, growing well in Denver.*

Arthur also reported on his experiences in Cohasset, California (3500 feet elevation). The overall Cohasset ridge in general and the steep slope on his property on the side of the ridge meant that air flow resulted in winter temperatures rarely going below about 20 degrees Fahrenheit, except for storm systems that lasted longer than three days.

When that happened he saw temperatures that would sometimes go down to about 10-15 degrees F; this usually happened 2-5 times each winter. In nine years there, the lowest winter temperature he recorded was 8 degrees. Each winter he lost some PCIs, usually on the order of 5-10%, but more often due to rot from too much moisture rather than from freezes.

The largest loss he suffered was when he had a late storm (in May!) that dropped 22 inches of snow, followed by temperatures in 60s the very next day. This resulted in a LOT of standing water on the beds under the melting snow with losses approaching 25-30% among the clumps due to rot.

After about the third year he gave up trying to grow PCIs from Joe Ghio in San Francisco Bay area, saying that although the plants were beautiful, they usually failed to survive the winter, and he thought his climate was just too different to that from that of the California coast they were bred in.



*Although Joe Ghio's 'Big Money' has grown well for Diane Whitehead, Arthur Goodwin finds PCIs bred in coastal California struggle in his climate.*

Alison Denning gardens at 4000 ft an hour outside Los Angeles, California, and she reported that only some PCI make it there. Winter temperatures rarely go as low as 20 degrees F, and most years the low has been in the mid-20s. She said she has not done well with purchased plants - her PCI selection is from the SPCNI seed exchange.



Jamie Vande, from Cologne in Germany, reported that he has a climate similar to the UK's although clearly continental versus maritime, and most PCIs survive well in the Zone 7. The lowest temperature in his area was  $-17^{\circ}\text{C}$ , rare, but two years running in the last 20. The biggest problem is winter wet, not absolute temperature. The PCIs, as well as many other iris, are particularly stressed from wet, cold to frozen roots. In areas with excellent drainage, such as sandy, leaf-mould type top soils, they do well. As soon as the soil gets heavy, with clay or too much organic material, the plants succumb to the freeze-thaw cycles accompanied by wet roots. He suspects that some PCIs bred in temperate, coastal climates are selected to grow well in those areas but will not thrive elsewhere.

Of the various seed lots he has attempted, some do very well, while others never catch on and die. *Iris douglasiana* and *I. tenax*, both of which he considers generally hardy and adaptable, show very clear survive/die reactions. As these were often (mostly) wild collected, and the failure was a complete seed lot, there is a degree of natural selection at play. He believes wetness is the deciding factor for all PCIs he has tried, not absolute cold and feels we overrate cold factors and underestimate moisture.

Arthur replied that when he grew PCIs in Northern California (at 3500 feet elevation), he also noticed that moisture + cold was a far bigger problem than just cold. He had nearly 150 clumps of PCIs planted in a series of terraced beds on a rather steep hillside, with the soil being heavy red clay heavily amended with peat moss, horse manure, and compost. Any water that stood in a bed in the winter for more than a day usually resulted in any clump shortly succumbing to rot. Drainage had to be almost perfect in order to avoid this.

The native PCI species where he lived in Cohasset, California was *I. hartwegii* which is usually cited as the most cold-hardy species. It grew wild in small clumps all over his property and, although it grew well from seed, almost never survived transplanting - not even when a 12x12x12 inch or so ball was moved (rather than bare root).

He had visions of using it to impart cold-hardiness to PCIs and tried crossing it with almost every variety of he had at one time or another. This often resulted in some seed set; but the resulting seedlings showed very little difference from *hartwegii*: some had bigger flowers but almost always colors were very similar to the yellow-cream of *hartwegii*; some had larger/longer leaves, and some produced noticeably bigger/more vigorous clumps, but only a handful had real change in color range and these usually were not very vigorous.

Jamie Vande has been thinking along the same lines. He has three seedlings from 'Orchid Respite' x *hartwegii* var. *australis*, not yet bloomed, but very winter hardy. They handled the  $-17^{\circ}\text{C}$  in a small pot, no problems. He has just transplanted them to a larger pot and hopes they will adjust and carry on.



*Iris hartwegii* as photographed by Steve Ayala at Placer County, California.

He says he has had excellent success with transplanting PCIs - about 90% survival with his own seedlings. He thinks that may be because they are selected in his own garden, although the seed comes from wide and far. He uses a gravelly potting mix, or one opened with perlite, allowing roots to descend all the way through the pots. From having lived in northern California, he knows this is not exactly imitating the natural conditions, but, in his wetter and cooler climate, it seems to work. He transplants in late July and August as time permits.

Kathleen Sayce added that a rock gardener who grows PCIs told her that perfect drainage is key to success with this group in colder climates, and said Arthur's experiences would bear this out. They simply do not like soggy roots.

Our East Coast correspondent, David Schmieder, from Concord, Massachusetts, chimed in to say that John White in Maine grew PCI for many years before they were wiped out in one extra-cold snowless winter period. John's climate was colder than his and -5F alone never seemed to kill his PCIs. He wished he could spend more time studying what works and what does not in his climate, or what versions of his climate they tolerate. But, on the other hand, he feels lucky just to keep a few of them going as perennials.

As you can see, there was a wide ranging response, and a consensus that winter survival depended as much on controlling extra moisture as it did on extreme cold.

For my own garden, in New Zealand's northeast, spring frosts are the real enemy. I grow most of my PCIs in bark spread across the surface of the soil, to a depth of about four inches. The soil is reasonably well drained but the bark adds an extra degree of drainage.

New Zealand's climate is largely maritime, but I garden in the lee of some 5,000 ft mountains, meaning our summers can be very dry—droughts are frequent and the PCIs will need some supplemental watering each summer. The winter cold is not a problem for them. Although we experience cold outbreaks in the winter, snow seldom sits for more than an hour or so, and most years does not sit at all.

Our problem is the frosts we frequently experience, including late frosts that occur during the flowering season.

I used to clean my plants up each autumn, trimming off excess foliage and generally tidying up, but I quickly learnt not to do this as it places the plants at increased risk from frost in the later winter/early spring season.



*Seedling with flattened stems, lying on the ground*

*Photograph: Gareth Winter*

The plants themselves are largely unaffected by the frosts but the flower stems are very prone to damage. This season we had a very bad frost as the main flowering season was starting, with lots of first year seedlings in bud. These have been decimated, with most now lying swan-necked on the ground. It seems that some seedlings are very prone to damage, but most experience it. At some point, and its exact location varies (sometimes it is almost at ground level, other times it is much higher) it seems the stem is so filled with liquid that the whole stem freezes, then thaws to a mush, the stems actually becoming flattened and falling. It is frustrating, and apart from selecting for later flower, there seems little I can do.



# Report from the seed supremo

Well, things have started. I have received seeds from Garry Knipe (in Cupertino), Kathleen Sayce (Nahcotta, WA), and Bob Sussman (Moorpark). As Garry's material included some packets with a small number of seeds, Kathleen and I are discussing how to deal with them. We may send them out as gifts for people who place large orders, as we do not want to make the number of seeds per packet too small.



*Louise Guerin , seed supremo for the SPCNI*

After three or four failed shippings from Canada using the club permit, we finally received some small packets of seeds from Diane Whitehead.

In view of a few minor disasters last year, I think anyone sending seeds should be advised to mark their envelope HAND CANCEL to avoid seeds being crushed by postal equipment. I do not mind cleaning chaff off of the seeds - it takes no time at all.

However, I would ask people sending seeds not to prepackage them into lots - one envelope per seed type is what I would prefer. I'm using glassine as much as possible for all seeds to save on shipping costs.

If anyone outside the United States wants to send seeds to the Exchange, please contact Kathleen Sayce for a copy of the permit/instructions and a shipping label.

Last year, we ran out of a number of the named hybrids, so if anyone has an excess of seeds from named parents, please send them. This is particularly useful for overseas members who otherwise have no access to the most modern genetic material. Hopefully we will be able to receive seed from their breeding programmes too.

Bob Sussman gave me a few crosses that look interesting. I hope we'll be able to include photos of those specific Iris. Garry also sent some photos to help show off his seed stock. I will be working with Bob Seaman to ensure they get included if at all possible.

That's about it for this year. I'm keeping an eye on my own seedlings. It's been a tough end of summer/early fall here in Southern California, but so far, they're hanging in there.

## How to get Full Color Print Copies of Pacific Iris

Print issues have color pages only on the front and back covers. The inside pages are generally black and white, regardless of whether they have photographs or other graphics. We cannot afford to print all pages of each issue in full color, but you can print your own.

- 1) Become a digital member. This requires a computer and email address.
- 2) If you do not have a computer with internet access, find a friend or family member who does, and let the Secretary or Membership Chairman know their name and email address. We will confirm that your issues go to that address. A digital copy of each issue of Pacific Iris will be sent to that person's email address; they can print the issue in full color for you. Or you can take the digital file to a commercial print shop to have it printed.

Color was added slowly in the first 40 years of the Society's existence. To get older back issues, order the 1973-2012 'First 40 Years' CD. All issues with color photos were scanned in color to preserve those images.

For Fall 2012 forward, contact the Secretary, and ask for issues to be sent to you by email. We are planning to post issues from Fall 2012 forward on the website, where they can be downloaded by members. When this feature is available, we will post a note in Pacific Iris, and on the website.



# Pacific Coast Iris in sunny Spain

Jan Jacobsen tells of his experiences with irises in Spain.

I am 56 years old and I live together with Cristina in a small village called El Vilosell, which is 140km south west of Barcelona. The village is situated 685mtr (2250ft) above sea level and we have a small piece of land - 4000m<sup>2</sup> (about an acre) where we grow a large variety of irises, but mainly Tall Bearded. In recent years we have expanded the number of spuria iris with lots of seedlings, and the arils are now increasing rapidly in numbers.

The climate here is near to perfect for most types of iris except sibiricas which can be somewhat tricky with our low humidity during summer. Our soil here is stony clay which when kept moist is really good but during dry months is like concrete. The bearded iris like it very much. The spuria iris enjoy it too, although they are covered with a layer of manure all year to keep the soil moist and cool.



A great percentage of the irises are grown from seed, and usually bloom quickly after germination due to the long growing season - some TB-SDB bloom the first year after germination.

Our climate is a mix between mountain and Mediterranean climate. Winters are normally dry with some frost down to -15C (5F) during January/February. Early spring produces most of the rain and summers can be very dry. The first two summers here I experi-

enced 5-6 months without rain. This year 2014 has been wetter but still on the dry side. The warm weather can continue until November when we have colder and rainy days, but also days with warm and sun. The temp during July-September is normally 25-35C (77-95F).

I started to be interested in iris during the last half of the 1980s and, together with lilies, they became a major part of my garden until 2011. In Denmark I mostly grew TB iris, but was also keen on arils, though the climate was difficult. I managed to raise a handful of nice aril-hybrids of my own and some species that could survive the wet summers and ever-changing winters. During my early garden years I focused very much on bulbous plants so, of course, Juno iris were part of my collection together with different kinds of species. All the iris from my garden were shipped to Spain in late 2010, where we planted 2-3000 TB and all the rest in our new piece of land.

Before moving to Spain I had very little experience with growing PCI. I had for some years, what apparently was an *I. tenax* hybrid. It grew quite well in the bed with rhododendrons, surviving harsh weather conditions for several years. I brought it with me here to Spain, but unfortunately it didn't survive the transition to this dry warm climate. Either that or (most likely) I killed it, not finding a good spot for it that was similar to where it grew in my old garden.

Even before moving here I realized that there will be a great opportunity to grow almost all kinds of iris in this part of Spain, so I joined the SPCNI to obtain more information and seed, and to try these wonderful iris out. Being impatient I also ordered some PCI plants from UK the first spring here. They should grow in our small garden close to the house, but this worked out really bad, and I lost all the plants during that year. I think they lacked water because they were planted too close to a large tree which consumed lots of water, and the soil was far from ideal!



The first SPCNI seed was sown in spring 2012, and germinated quite well during that spring. Those pots without germinated seeds were left for the following year. I had prepared special beds for the new seedlings under our almond trees which are the only trees we have to give shade. The beds were raised 10-15 cm from the ground prior to planting, and the existing soil was removed. The hole was filled with sphagnum so the total growing medium is 25-30 cm deep, and that seems to suit the PCIs very well. (see picture below) The sphagnum we use is ready-mixed with perlite and fertilizer (15-15-15) plus root accelerator. I use this in all the pots, both for seedlings and mature plants, and in our raised beds where we have other plants which prefer low pH soil.

This spring 2014 I tried another mix of soil for those PCI seedlings which had germinated during autumn/winter, but that did not turn out very well, I lost many of them due to that mixture, so no more experiments!

The first year growing in the prepared beds most of the new seedlings settled in quite well—and I had hoped to see a few blooms in 2012, but it evenuated that I needed to wait another year before seeing flowers from the first batch of seedlings.

This first blooming season here produced about 25 different flowers. In my opinion there are not any ugly PCIs but we all have our favourites, and personally I might get a little tired of too many violet ones. My preference is for the contrast colours and warm tones, but as said, all PCIs are very beautiful!

One of the seedlings that stood out from the rest is a lovely yellow/cream with blue lines (picture below). It has big flowers, wonderful form and a superb colour-combination. I got some seed pods from this one, and this spring planted out the seedlings.



From those there are 5-10 very promising ones as far as vigorous growth and healthy foliage goes. They have already produced several side-shoots in the first few months of growing in the soil, so I really look forward to seeing the flowers from these plants.

The care for PCIs here in Spain is probably not very different from what growers do in the US. Here they start their new growth very early on depending the weather, but from late January and onwards new foliage and shoots emerge, and during that time I water to keep the soil moist. Around mid/late April we have the first flowers, and this year the blooms continued during most of May. The soil is then kept moist until mid-summer when the seed-pods are ready. After that I water once a week to 10 days - not much but enough to keep the soil from drying out completely. From mid-October the autumn growth begins and it is probably the best time to divide the plants here. Normally we have colder rainy weather during October-November. In winter the PCIs are left alone to whatever nature exposes them to.





As a beginner with PCIs, the first goal is to have a good number of plants in a wide range of colours and sizes. From that I can select those I want to use for further crossings to produce the flowers I like. Just as importantly, I am aiming for a healthy plant which preferably increases well and adapts to the conditions here.



At the moment the plants we have are growing in sphagnum. I have tried to plant a few in our ordinary soil, under some small trees. They seem to survive and grow well, so hopefully I will be able to move extras out to different places in our land.



PCIs are an exotic iris here in Europe, considered rare even by iris-growers, but highly admired by almost all our visitors and I can see from the response on the internet that it is an iris many want to try in the garden or pots.



Only a few nurseries in Europe offer these irises for sale, so the way to introduce and grow PCI is from seed. It might be also the most secure way for gardeners in northern Europe.

We are lucky to have favourable conditions here in Spain for PCIs, and it's surely an iris you can grow and enjoy also when you're getting older and want to cut back on the hard work.

We have a Facebook page "El Vilosell Iris" if someone is interested to see more from our land and village.



*The Greater Portland Iris Society, host for the 2015 American Iris Society National Convention, invites all iris friends to Portland, Oregon for "Iris In Wonderland 2015", May 18-23*

*PCI lovers will find plenty to see at Aitken's Salmon Creek Garden, Mt Pleasant Iris Farm and Wildwood Gardens and optional others.*



# Pacifica Iris in the Press

Promoting the cultivation of PCIs is one of the main goals of SPCNI. When Kathleen Sayce first joined the SPCNI board, she took on the task of placing articles about Pacifica Iris in mainstream gardening magazines. It took a few years, but this year her efforts paid off with two articles in two different magazines.

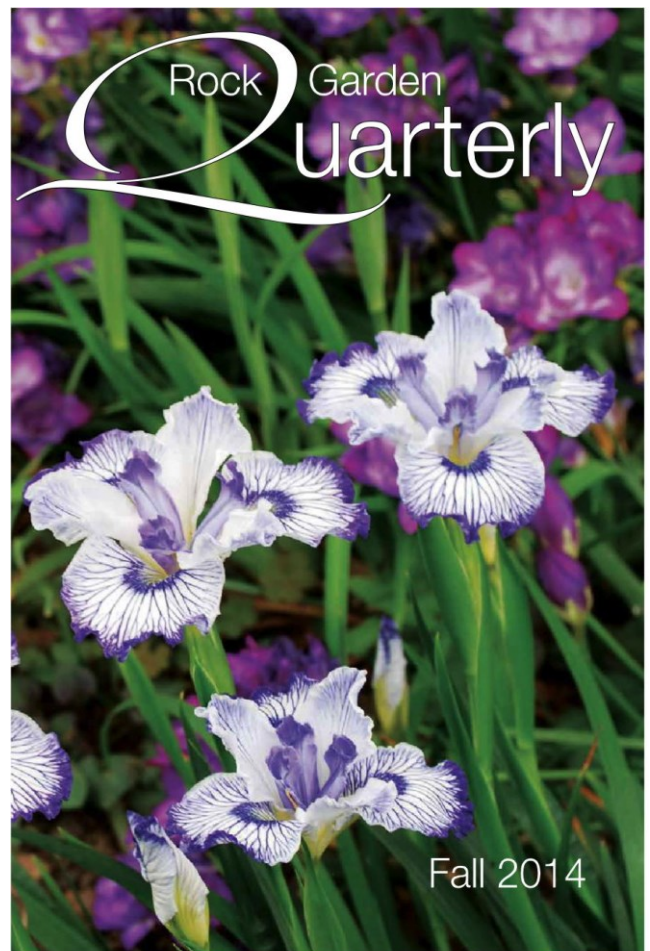
Last fall she wrote an article for Pacific Horticulture, “Botanical Divas: Pacific Coast Iris”, for the Winter 2014 issue. The cover photo was taken by Garry Knipe of his new winter-flowering PCI ‘Premonition of Spring’. This magazine is published by Pacific Horticulture Society, on line at <http://www.pacifichorticulture.org>. Back issues are posted for a few quarters at <http://www.pacifichorticulture.org/magazine/>. As of late September, last winter’s issue was still posted at <http://www.pacifichorticulture.org/articles/pacific-coast-iris-2/> with additional online content at <http://www.pacifichorticulture.org/articles/pacific-coast-iris/>; there are also links to purchase print copies of this issue. Many photos that were not published with the article are included in additional online resources.



This summer Kathleen wrote a second article for the Rock Garden Quarterly, “Pacific Coast Iris: A glorious challenge for rock gardeners”, published by the North American Rock Garden Society. Just published in late September 2014, this issue is currently available only to NARGS members, in print and digitally.

Again, one of Garry Knipe's photos made the cover, featuring Joe Ghio's introduction 'Finger Pointing', growing in a private garden in the San Francisco Bay Area. Past issues are open to the public on the NARGS website, so sometime in Spring 2015 you will be able view this issue on-line at <https://www.nargs.org/rock-garden-quarterly>. Look for Garry's great cover photo. Or join NARGS today and get your own copy. Until this issue was published, more than twenty years had passed since the last mention of PCIs in RGQ—it was time for an article that featured PCIs. Emma Elliott and Bob Sussman were important contributors to this article, with rock gardening and hot climate growing experiences, respectively.

Many members contributed photos to both articles, including Emma Elliott, Garry Knipe, Richard Richards, Bob Sussman, and Ken Walker for the SPCNI photo collection. Thank you again to everyone who helped make these articles successful. Kathleen may be the 'author' but these articles were definitely group efforts. Digital copies of both will be archived as PDFs for SPCNI.



# Iridescence in Irises

Robert Pries, Director of the American Iris Society and mastermind behind the AIS Iris Encyclopedia, has been thinking about the possibilities of iridescence.

Most of us have had a peacock feather at one time in our life and marveled at its iridescence. If you look at light coming through the feather you see it as an all-black object but if you see light bouncing off the surface you see the wonderful glory of metallic greens and blues that seem to glow. How a black object can produce such wonderful colors is iridescence. It is a feature based on the microscopic structure of the surface.



*Peacock feathers—<http://ommorphiabeautybar.com>*

We are familiar with it in other birds such as hummingbirds, birds of paradise, and Indigo buntings. Also butterflies and moths often achieve great colors through iridescence. But what about Iris? I do not know the history of the word but the irid part makes me think that the word began with an association with Irises.

At this point I need to clarify my terms. There are degrees of iridescence. I would like to discuss what I am going to call alpha iridescence. By this I mean an object that is one color but appears a totally different color when sunlight strikes it a certain way and it lights up. Lesser forms of iridescence are not uncommon in Irises. We often speak of Tall-bearded flowers as being diamond dusted. I am sure this is a surface feature. In aril irises there is often a metallic sheen to flower color that must also be a surface character. But can you remember

any irises that light up like our peacock feather? I can.

About 25-30 years ago when I was just starting with Irises, I ordered Pacific Coast Natives from Colin Rigby. I knew they were supposed to be difficult to grow in Missouri but Colin shipped potted plants in the Spring when they were forming roots. They came as vigorous plants in 2 inch pots and that Spring several bloomed even before I had a chance to plant them. One or two in particular really blew me away. I can remember distinctly signal areas that glowed just like a peacock feather. Time has erased from memory the names of these cultivars but they left an indelible mark on my brain and I have been seeking to see again this alpha iridescence. Of course that first attempt failed, and it would take many more tries before I could claim any type of success, but I assure you PCNs can be grown in Missouri ... but that is another topic.

Having been exposed once to alpha iridescence in Iris I am continually on the lookout for it. A couple of years ago I grew another member of the Iris family, a *Moraea* which had a very prominent alpha iridescent turquoise blue signal.



*Moraea villosa subsp. villosa*  
from <http://www.ispot.org.za>



There are several *Moraea* species which have iridescence. This convinced me that the trait is lurking in the genes of many irises. Sadly it is very hard from a photograph to tell that you are looking at iridescence or simply a base color. I seem to remember references to iridescence in the Sino-Siberians and it would seem likely that crosses with PCNs could create iridescent Cal-sibes. We do not have a classification of iridescence that would allow us to communicate its degrees. Let me suggest the following which should be improved as our experience grows:

- Diamond dusting, a sparkling effect on the surface
- Metallic sheen, essentially no change in color
- Alpha iridescent, a distinctly different color from the background color that is projected from the surface.

At this time it would seem the PCNs offer the highest probability of exhibiting this trait and it would seem that it could be found and developed in many types of beardless irises. But what about the Bearded irises? At the Dallas Convention, this Spring, I discovered two introductions by Rick Tasco that showed some alpha iridescence. They were arilbreds so it is entirely possible the trait could be moved into all classes of bearded irises.

I wish I could say with confidence the names of these two irises. I still have not gotten through all my notes and slides from convention, but I think one was 'New Vision' because at the time I thought the name very appropriate. I would not have noticed the iridescence, except that one stalk of that beautiful clump had been pushed over. Its odd position allowed the sun to reach deep into the flower and produce a marvelous flash of green iridescence in the heart of that pinkish flower. As yet this trait may not be such that it displays from a distance in the garden. But it was more than just my imagination and I tried to point it out to all that would look.

For now iridescence should probably be considered a novelty trait like horns or variegation. Hopefully, there will be better observers than myself, who will come forward with names of varieties that exhibit this alpha-iridescent trait. If we can call attention to these, hybridizers might try to create some even more spectacular irises. I will create a category in the Novelty section of the Iris Encyclopedia where we could collect comments and observations and perhaps lead to an awareness of the possibilities.



*Many of John Taylor's Australian-bred PCIs show hints of iridescence.*

*Photos: John Taylor*



# Growing report from the East Coast

**Susan Lambiris, Raleigh, NC:** This wasn't a very interesting year for me, I am afraid. We had a late cold snap which, I suspect, was to blame for the below-average amount of PCI bloom that followed. An exception was my newly planted clump of 'Wandering Eye', which unfortunately expired shortly after blooming, to my great disappointment. Fortunately all my established iris and a handful of newcomers have come through the winter, and the very unusually wet (and, for North Carolina, cool) summer that followed, quite well, so I can hope for better bloom next year. And, as usual, I'm now expecting fresh shipments of Pacificas to expand my collection and keep me excited about the new discoveries that the next bloom season may reveal!

Best wishes to PCI growers everywhere.

**David Schmieder, Concord, MA:** Spring arrived here this year about a month late. Maybe fortunately for me, for it allowed me to finally get about 60 batches of seeds of all types of iris processed and into the refrigerator to stratify mid-March since not much outdoor work could be done. Inexcusably though, it was July before I made the time to start getting them out to plant in pots, and many were already germinating. I planted about 16 of those batches, and was happy to see some of them continue growing. The spring had stayed mostly wet, with heavy rains usually lasting 24 hours to greet newly opened blossoms on my established PCI seedlings. I enjoyed them nevertheless, and was able to photograph some and even try some crosses, none of which the unfavorable weather allowed to take. However, nature's pollinators managed three pods totalling 54 seeds to which I hope to add some seed from the exchanges, and treat them more promptly and kindly for next season. Of this year's first 16 batches just mentioned, only two were PCI, and did have a few sprouting. I try to avoid diseases, but either my mistakes or their susceptibility started some keeling over before I felt them strong enough to set out. There was only 1 left when I had no choice but to try it in the ground, and so far it appears that less crowding and less hot humid weather has allowed it to survive. It was probably still July when I planted the next 16 batches in pots, more of them being PCI. The same thing occurred so I chose another bed that had been too dry for JI, reworked it, and planted the 24 tiny PCI seedlings that remained. I decided to add to the experiment by lightly mulching right away with cedar bark, since as I have mentioned in earlier reports, that has seemed to keep the calisibe 'Scarlet Accent' performing well for several years. It is only a short time later now, but they all still look much happier, with a chance to survive if this new environment plus the salt marsh hay winter protection I will give them suits them well enough.

I must apologize for not managing to keep alive the few germinating seeds from the most important batch of 71 seeds so generously sent to me by Richard Richards as mentioned in last fall's 'Pacific Iris'. I did go ahead and plant it anyway in the very center of the new bed, in hopes that some more of them may still germinate and survive, this season or next. And I hope that someone in these parts will see the opportunity to instead do this right and decide to enjoy the pleasures of working toward new PCI that grow well on the East Coast!

# PCI and HIPS

Our ever diligent secretary Kathleen Sayce received an interesting request the other day - the new editor for the Historical Iris Preservation Society (HIPS), Nancy McDonald, asked her to consider doing an article on historic PCIs for HIPS.

The history and evolution of garden of PCIs is much more recent than that of other forms of iris, especially the bearded irises that HIPS members seem to devote much of their time to. I see a copy of each HIPS magazine and am always astonished to see the huge number of varieties that are pictured there, and the interesting way that 'new' historic irises are still being found in deserted gardens across Europe and North America.

Of course, that is less likely to happen with PCIs, given their constrained distribution and the inherent difficulties in transplanting at anything other than optimal times. Nonetheless, there must be caches of older varieties hidden away in gardens up and down the Pacific coast.

Of course, Richard Richards and Jean Witt, and others who have been involved in breeding and growing PCIs for many years, will have a lot to say about which varieties they consider to be the most tried and true, and which of these are still available from commercial nurseries.

Those of us who grow on the periphery of the PCI world have a more difficult proposition, as we mainly grow our own seedlings, usually from SPCNI seed. Those of you who are interested in older Tall Bearded will know the name of New Zealand's greatest irisarian, Jean Stevens, famous for 'Pinnacle', 'Summit' and 'Sunset Snows', the latter in the background of many of the finest irises today. You may not know that she was also very interested in breeding PCIs, and won a prize at the Chelsea Flower Show for her strain of *I. innominata*.

Bob Seaman brought up that a number of plants have been circulating in the trade for many years without being formally registered. Among those mentioned were 'Ami Royale', 'Cape Sebastian', 'Crandall's White', and 'Dorothea's Ruby/Rubies/Dorthea's Ruby'. If you would like to help in either project (and they should probably run side-by-side) Kathleen would love to hear from you.



*Historic Mitchell Medal winners, from top, "Ojai", "Sierra Sapphire", and "Canyon Snow".*

*Photos: SPCNI CD, Matilija Nursery*

# Welcome to the SPCNI

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*Some of Jan Jacobsen's  
PCI seedlings.*

*For details of growing PCIs in  
Denmark and Spain,  
see pages 13-15.*

*Photos by Jan Jacobsen*





# Historic Mitchell Medal winners



*Mitchell Medal winners, from top left: 'Ojai', 1981; 'Sierra Sapphire', 1977; 'Soquel Cove', 1980; 'Restless Native', 1981, 'City Hall', 1984; Big Money', 1990*

*All photographs from the SPCNI CD*



# Newer Mitchell Medal winners



*Recent winners of the Mitchell Medal include, from left from top, 'Cozumel', Joe Ghio, 2006; 'Wine and Cheese', Vernon Wood, 2008; 'Mendocino Blue', Robert and Janet Canning, 2009; 'Star of Wonder', Joe Ghio, tied 2011; 'Ocean Blue', Joe Ghio, tied 2012; 'Bar Code', Joe Ghio, tied 2011, and 'Lines That Rhyme', Joe Ghio, tied 2013.*