



Pacific Iris

Almanac of the Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris

Matilija Nursery hybrids



As President Bob Sussman says in his Presidential Message in this issue, things have not been easy in southern California. Bob reported in the March 2016 issue of *Pacific Iris* about the difficulties he had been experiencing through the sustained drought the area was experiencing, and how some of his PCIs were suffering. Fortunately things are looking up a little - you can read more about it in his piece on page 4, including details of the above seedlings, but the results of his breeding programme show that he is doing something right!

Gareth Winter

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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

All three volumes, \$20.00

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 free PDF from the SPCNI
website.

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

Members are encouraged to join this group, which provides
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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.

Editor's notes

This issue has been a very interesting one to put together. We have an update from our President, Bob Sussman, as he continues his battle against the ongoing drought in southern California, while from a little further north, Joe Ghio has penned a piece about the history of his Pacific Coast Iris breeding, and where he sees the future of the PCIs heading. Other members contribute their views on the prospects for our favourite irises, and we have an interesting mix of view, especially from those in colder climates. Hint - inter-specific hybrids are a possibility!

We have a wonderful piece on the role of PCIs in the gardens of Portland OR by blogger Lance Wright. Lance shifted to Oregon as a six-year-old from California, growing up needing to be in the outdoors. After getting a B.S. in Sociology, he took a break before starting a masters, and found that he preferred gardening, so went back to school to obtain horticultural qualifications. Lance was hired by the City of Portland Parks and Recreation where he worked until retirement.

He was responsible for the horticulture in the downtown parks for 16 years, converting some large display beds into mixed shrub/perennial beds with annuals and herbaceous tropicals as accents. He created xeric beds utilizing natives, Mediterraneans and West Coasties. Other beds included those of a woodland character utilizing Himalayans and other zone appropriate forest plants. His views on Pacificas are very interesting.

Our colour section includes some wonderful imagery of Joe Ghio's flowering season, lifted from the Bay View Gardens Facebook page. Joe must have a new camera as the images are stunning!

John Taylor has also sent a wonderful CD of images from his garden, with a breathtaking range of seedlings.

All the best from a cyclone-drenched New Zealand.

Gareth

Presidents Message -

Bob Sussman

For gardeners and commercial growers the weather is always a wild card that can result in great success or disappointing failure. If the conditions that cause failure persist long enough the grower has to make some serious decisions and adjustments or just give up and move on to cultivating artificial flowers - after all, plastic plants just need to be hosed down once in a while. This is the situation that many gardeners and growers have been facing in southern California with several years of severe drought.

Given this situation we have augmented our very low levels of rain with irrigation water. After several years of using supplemental irrigation sources, the water has become increasingly mineralized. This is especially true when using wells or ground water.

Since artificial flowers or artificial Pacific Coast Iris really aren't an option (only my mother-in-law would consider them exceptional pieces of living art for her garden and that's all I can say about this) what are we to do? A gardener has to make changes to what they do and how they do it and that's all there is to it.

We started looking at which ingredients of the nursery and soil mixes seem to produce acceptable results? It turns out that adding a much higher percentage of perlite to our soil mix seems to produce really nice results. Also, cutting back the irrigation water in summer to twice per month gets us through the hot months just fine. One of my customers suggested adding sulphur to our soil mix - for a bunch of reasons that I don't fully understand (he's a chemist) it helps.

Now if it would only just rain! Last year, northern California's rainfall was slightly above average at 20" to 30". Northern California is the prime area for Pacific Coast Iris. All 13 species (as Kathleen Sayce has shown) grow in this region, and lots of commercial growers are based there as well. They are back in business but in southern California that's not the case. We only got 8" of rain and the 5th year of drought.

We're in southern California, a marginal area for growing Pacific Coast Iris. They can grow here just fine with some simple adjustment but this is beyond their natural range. We are all good so far... the changes we made to growing our Pacific Coast Iris worked just fine. The crop is growing again... we are dividing new hybrids so we'll have a crop for sale next year or the year after... and, unbelievably, this year (supposed to be another dry year according to the scientists) we have had above average rain!



We have some interesting irises for next year. The yellow above is a cross between 'Clincher' x ('Seagal' x 'Stroke of Midnight'). I tend to repeat the cross parents that do well in our area which is I'm sure a pretty common thing among hybridizers. The two with the veining get the patterning from 'Untitled', an older hybrid that we grow a lot of and the veining seems to come through to many of its offspring. The cross 'Clincher' x 'Now Showing', both older hybrids by now, produces irises with lots of ruffles. The siblings tend to have color ranges from brown to maroon for the falls, sometimes with a yellow/gold signal.

Growing these for sale commercially is somewhat of a long process. Each iris produces roughly eight pieces or divisions the following year. All that means is it takes roughly three to four years before we have sufficient numbers to both sell and keep productions going.

But we are on the way forward again after our travails, so don't give up. Each year has its challenges in the garden. Be a good observer and try different things until it all works out.

And if it doesn't? Well, you can always plant plastic irises.



Back to the future?

Joe Ghio

It is the spring of 2017 and I was taking in the beauty of the first blooms of the new season. I came to the blooms on one of my first Pacifica introductions made in 1970, 'Pasatiempo'. The others in that first year were the yellow, 'Califia' and the lavender, 'Aptos'. Glancing back at the first flowers of the 2017 seedling crop that were just coming into bloom, I had to marvel at how far we have come after a half century of Pacifica hybridizing.



1970's introduction 'Pasatiempo' - photo SPCNI CD

If asked in 1970 what does the future hold, I never would have imagined the beauties we now have: substance, form, ruffling, and growth have all made strides barely thought of then. To get to the future we need to examine the past.

My work started on seed given to me by Jack Craig (the artist who drew the original SPCNI logo) and a student/aide of Sydney B. Mitchell, head librarian at the University of California, Berkeley. Prof. Mitchell gave Jack some California seed sent to him from others.

Mitchell was well known as a conduit, gathering seed from horticulturalists from all over the world. He would then distribute that seed to others who he felt would explore their potential as commercial possibilities. Frank Reinelt, who is best known in iris circles as the originator of the arilbred 'Capitola', was also world renowned as the developer of the Pacific Coast strains of delphinium, primrose, and tuberous begonia and received some of his original seed of each strain from Prof. Mitchell.

I incorporated genes from irises collected around me in the Santa Cruz area with the Mitchell/Craig strain. I also used Marjorie Brummitt's varieties which were imported from England and incorporated them into my breeding. Francesca Thoolen obtained seed from Hargrave hybrids from Australia (based on material from Danks who obtained the original seed from Prof. Mitchell). Francesca shared this seed with me from which I introduced the red, 'Emigrant' and the gold, 'Foreign Exchange', and they were included in my line.



'Emigrant', introduced 1980 - photo Richard Richards

Later Dick and Joyce Richards shared some *munzii* blooms they had just collected in the Coffee Creek stand in the Sierra foothills. Lewis and Adele Lawyer gave me a plant of their 'Valley Banner' hybrid, 'Foothill Banner', before introduction which was combined with my material. To this day I refer to the line as 'Foothill Banner' line rather than 'Valley Banner' line.

Thus all these sources become the bases of the Ghio line of Pacifica irises: The wide full form, heavy ruffling, colorings, patterns, and combinations now available.

So what does the future - beyond Ghio - hold? Predictions are always fraught with pitfalls, so I will limit my comments to what I can see beginning with “now”. The Valley/Foothill Banner line can and will continue to give wonderful things. Pacificas’ natural open form shows off the contrasting styles on a range of colors and patterns.

Our ‘New Blood’ (‘05) is the first to show a “ruby heart”, a spectrum red signal. This is the first time I have ever seen even a trace of true red in any iris type. I have been working to get the spectrum red signal to cover more and more of the fall. WAR ZONE (‘08) is the most advanced of this effort. I don’t believe you can ever have a complete self of true red, but the signal area can be bred to cover a significant surface of the petal.



‘New Blood’— a breakthrough in the quest for a red iris

Multi-branched stems are here now and can be extended to more cultivars. Stephanie Mills who lives some five miles up the north coast from Santa Cruz has shown me an isolated stand of *I. douglasiana* on her property. It is located about two miles up from the Pacific shore on the banks of Laguna Creek at about the 1,000 foot level of the coastal foothills. Interestingly Laguna Creek is a water source for nearby farmers and the City of Santa Cruz but this iris colony has not been contaminated by other nearby species as is so common in the Santa Cruz mountain complex.

What is unique about this colony? They are robust growing, producing normal lavender/cream *douglasiana* type blossoms of large size and most distinctly: very tall stalks of upwards of 30+ inches. This means tall blooming Pacificas are possible.

This brings forward the importance of finding naturally isolated colonies, not contaminated by other nearby colonies, that have thrown the centuries-evolved distinct strains as in the above Laguna Creek strain. Early on I collected blooms from an isolated colony that would begin blooming as early as Christmas time. At the time these were collected this was an isolated undeveloped oak glen near the Pasatiempo golf course. This area has since been developed into a gated community. Dr. Lenz confirmed that this was a unique isolated colony of the usual *douglasiana-fernaldii-macrosiphon* Santa Cruz mountain hybrid complex. This again points out the importance of discovering these colonies before development overtakes them.



A new seedling, 2017—photo Joe Ghio

One of the first of the trio of 1970 introductions - ‘Pasatiempo’ - comes directly from that colony and carries the early blooming trait. While I didn’t pursue this trait too far since other developments caught my fancy, it is a trait that can be recovered and extended in the future. ‘Councilman’ and ‘Restless Native’ are a couple of my earlier introductions that exhibit this early blooming trait.

And so we come full circle: back to the past to get to the future.

Joe Ghio

The Special Ones

Philip Jones, Scotland

I am gradually arriving at a collection of PCIs that are special. My “Special PCIs” are the result of discarding about half of what was a large number of plants grown from seed.

About four or five years ago I ordered the seed from all the sources I could find. You could say that it represented everything available at the time. As I was discarding and selecting I was able also to give the plants more room and so this year photographing them became a main gardening activity.



This is the purple flower with upright pale standards that are slightly folded. The fold is more pronounced in the yellow, the cream and the white offspring.

There is nothing odd or unusual about these flowers. They simply look elegant. The shape and the colour are all important.



‘Kinnoull’ is my original PCI, named after my monastery in Perth.

Now in November as I look at the pictures I can consider what was so special about “the special ones.” The pictures shown are the most obvious candidates. There are some others that are quite different and not particularly beautiful but which I feel need investigating. The most elegant flowers are those where the standards seem to have a folded formation. These were seedlings that resulted from crosses with my registered PCI ‘Kinnoull’.



There are also three plants that have a cushion-like formation. The lavender one is perhaps the best example. I am particularly pleased with the way the style branch at the centre of the flower plays a decisive part in the overall effect.

It is white and the serrated edges or crest makes for an attractive lace-like effect. This is a completely different shape to the folded standard ones, but it could easily be considered "the people's favourite".

There is also a pinkish buff form and another one that is special because it has four petals, and four sepals and four style branches.



There is one plant that I consider special even though - as they say - it is nothing special to look at. What is special is that it had a flower bud showing on July 22nd. I have taken seed from it this year.

Since writing this article last year I now think that the tall white plant is probably the most important for the future. The foliage is neat, not untidy and sprawling like so many PCIs and the flowers stand proud of the foliage. I am sowing self-crossed seeds from it to see what kind of variations it is hiding. Over the years I have come to the view that if you have something special then sow the self-crossed seeds from it because variations on a theme are usually much more interesting and better focused than crossing with another hybrid.

Some irises I selected seemed odd rather than attractive. In five plants the flowers were very narrow with striped petals and sepals in pink and lavender. One flower is a little wider than the others and seems to me particularly attractive. But the whole seems to have possibilities. They have a special style that could be isolated and given time they might come to be recognised as "special ones".

The flowers of these plants also have a wider formation than most of the other PCIs. That is to say the standards are not particularly upright. The impression is more horizontal than vertical. This has been noted as typical of *I. tenuissima* and *I. purdyi*, also *I. hartwegii* subsp. *pinetorum* and *I. tenax* subsp. *klamathensis*.

There is a nice description of this in Victor A. Cohen's *A Guide to the Pacific Coast Hybrid*. p33. He was "able to see *I. purdyi* in a fairly pure and true state. Quite a number of plants were in flower on a hillside, growing in considerable shade. The flowers were rather pale, at best a rich cream colour, but they were all very large and flat, somewhat reminiscent of some large flowered Clematis hybrids." This is clearly something for the future.

I have some seedlings of *I. chrysophylla* that are also horizontally inclined. But I will be looking at seed lists over Christmas in order to feed what might well be described as a growing fixation.



All photographs in this article taken by Philip Jones, of his own seedlings.

Philip Jones

Pacific Coast Native Irises—the future

For the last issue of *Pacific Iris* we asked for those interested in the future of *Pacific Coast Iris* to tell us of their thoughts. We ran out of space and have held some over for this issue, starting with **Ken Walker**, the Society's Recorder, who gardens in Concord, CA.

In 2012 I presented a photographic overview of PCI colors and patterns, tracking ancestry in a few cases. I covered:

Purple
Blue (*I. munzii*)
Lavender (*I. douglasiana* & *I. munzii*)
Pink (*Iris tenax* & *Iris douglasiana*)
Red (*Iris innominata*, 'Claremont Indian', & 'Emigrant')
Yellow (*I. innominata*)
Brown ('Gone Native')
White (*I. douglasiana*)
Bi-tone
Bi-color
Dark styles (several wild-collected hybrids, especially 'Valley Banner' & 'Greenbriar Contrast')
Light styles
Slash on fall
Plicata
Halo

I have not tried my hand at developing hybrid PCI cultivars. If I did, my preference would be for flowers with clean simple lines, separated falls, and distinct, upright standards. Why not leave round, flat, frilly flowers to plants that produce them naturally?

I enjoy a variety of colors and patterns. I'm particularly drawn to strong colors with, perhaps, clean simple patterns. Deep red-blacks and whites with wonderful blue-purple veining particularly catch my eye, but I can also appreciate the delicate, subtle color combinations that some people enjoy.

I think we need plants suited to a variety of garden contexts. Large, bold clumps look nice from a distance. Sprays of small fine foliage are great for more intimate settings. I gather that producing plants with consistent, upright stalks is genetically difficult, but I hope to see continued progress in that area.

Ken Walker



'Greenbriar Contrast' - 1958 introduction from wild collected seed. Photo—SPCNI CD

I like the species, love ruffles, wild colour combinations - John Taylor's, Joe Ghio's introductions.

What is missing? Scent. In 2001 I grew some seeds of *douglasiana* x a fragrant *macrosiphon* from Garry Knipe. I didn't get any fragrant flowers. I wonder if Garry carried on to success?

My breeding goal is multiple flowers well-spaced on a single stem. Five seem ideal.

Diane Whitehead

Jamie Vande is based in Cologne, Germany, where he has a small city garden. He has a wide variety of gardening interests—he says he has rarely met a plant he didn't like

I started attempting PCIs about 18 years ago, imports from England (only source I found) and received some seed (I was then an RHS member), as well. The seedlings did OK, but the registered plants languished and quickly expired. I was not sure my climate would handle selections from the UK, despite our similar climates, and the seedlings, although 'pretty', were not that interesting. Foliage tended to be rough and difficult to keep attractive, while the flowers were simply lavender. Nothing to get the heart beating faster.

I have been hybridizing plants for over 20 years and have assimilated much information, as well as learning a great deal from my own crosses with iris and Hemerocallis. Although these two families have different suites of pigments, the production and inheritance is apparently very similar. I am finding most of the vectors I know from Hemerocallis are valid for Iris. This has given me great hope for iris generally and offered some clear goals I wish to attain.



*Hemerocallis 'Temple of the Muses' -
Jamie Vande*

With the increasing wet of my climate (yes, global warming, just as predicted for my region), I have abandoned bearded iris in the garden. They simply rot during the winter or get boiled in July. My arils have to be kept in special beds, which is a challenge. One fussy child is enough. And there are plenty of wet-tolerant to wet loving irids. I am now concentrating on species-x in the *laevigata-spuria-siberica-hexagona* complex, aiming for 40-44 chromosome stability. PCI fit in well.

What am I aiming for? First, is plant quality. My first attempts lead me to the conclusion that selection for PCI is very dependent on the local climate (UK sourced plants were not hardy enough). Cologne is wet for 9 months of the year (this year over 200cm in summer!) with a short summer and warmish winter (-17°C is still a record low).

Actually this is not far from some of the niches PCIs inhabit in the wilds, albeit colder on occasion and not so dry in summer.

Other than general hardiness, I select for upright foliage and dense clumping - sprawling plants are culled. I am a city gardener and room in the garden is sorely limited. Unruly plants are a nuisance and, as city gardening is on the rise, compacter plants with impact have a clear future. Also, pods often rot in our wet summer and seed production is limited. I hope this will sort itself over the generations.

Re-bloom would be great, but I've never encountered it amongst the PCIs and, generally, it is dependent on light energy. In the north re-bloom is a rare occurrence in all plants. As you may have guessed, I believe the plant must come first. Beautiful blossoms cannot exist in a void, they require proper support, both metaphysically and physically.

Flowers? Hmm, here I am open to many directions. As I have had very good results with hybrids from Ghio strains, they currently dominate my selections, however, these wide, ruffled forms are a bit static and two dimensional, and I see more open, attenuated forms offering an interesting palette. I was quite taken by 'Valley Banner', of which I am raising some seedlings, with its more open form, veining and bicolor.



'Valley Banner' - photo SPCNI CD

I plan to push this further and hope for seedlings where the stands are more upright (oblique) and aim for more difference in the ratio of standard to fall lengths, adding extra dimension to the bloom.

A plant with architectural blooms and good branching on upright stems would be most welcome. Back to the disc-shaped blossom, yes, this offers more canvas for the creative selector. Veining, plicata, contrasting styles, etc. may all play a role. Color clarity can be an issue. Pigment blending is not that straight forward and we still need more (genetic) sorting in the various colour families.

I get the feeling many do not yet understand how the colour is structured in the blossom tissues and thus make ill-advised crosses. One must always remain open to an experiment, but careful consideration of the parents (and their inheritance) will save the potential hybridizer much time and disappointment. Admittedly our knowledge in this area is still sketchy, but simply 'washing' a petal with a bit of soap will dissolve the anthocyanins and leave the fat-bound carotenes, allowing us to consider the grounding of the visual effect. I need to do this more often!



2017 Ghio seedling - photo Joe Ghio

The colours in the PCIs are a bit different from my work with *Hemerocallis*, which are all derived from yellows (carotene) with fulvus overlays (anthocyanins: cyanidin and delphinidin, often with co-pigments). Still, with this apparently limited pigmentation we have created colours in all parts of the spectrum..... other than true blue. Frankly, who needs a blue daylily! Yes, a genetic challenge, but the practical side escapes me.

With PCI we are seeing increased patterning coupled with some interesting colour, such as the turquoise eye-zone. Apparent colour is the product of pigment layers. Assumedly, we are seeing a pale carotene, layered with a blue anthocyanin (delphinidins?), augmented by chlorophyll (we often forget that chlorophyll is a pigment, too). Actually a simply combination. One wonders why it has not been more common. Perhaps it is often masked by other factors.

As I have little experience with wild populations, I can't comment on the source. Perhaps we have a crystalline change that is breaking the spectrum, as well (think of butterfly wings). As most colour mutations are based on the loss of part of the original colour molecule (part of the glycoside comes away), most colour mutation will tend toward the red spectrum, not to the blue! Red-violet to blue-violet is the anthocyanin base. We simply do not have enough information at this time to make a proper conclusion. In any case, this interests me and I am selecting for it as best as I can.

Another direction I can see coming is tetraploidy. This opens the road to wide crosses, as well as releasing hidden inheritances. As with *Hemerocallis*, we may find a genetic relationship to eye-zone and edge pigmentation. On such a small flower as a PCI, this may well be extremely gaudy and nothing more than a passing fancy, but the prospects are interesting. We may see edge fringing and teeth, as well. I do not yet have this in my planning. First, I need to better understand the diploid inheritance.

As a hobby hybridizer, one is not dependent on plant sales, and fashion is to be made, not followed. That said, if one's creations do not attain some audience, all the work will be lost to future generations. We are seeing this, already, in many creative areas. The market dictates the product. How many worthy cultivars have been lost forever, just in the past few decades? A good reason to be part of a plant society. Better to be a drop in the bucket, than a drop on the hot griddle.

Jamie Vande



Lover of all irises, **Bob Pries** struggles to grow PCNs in his garden. Here are his thoughts on the future.

When I look at images of the PCNs that have already been produced I am struck by the beauty that we already have, and sadly, that generally eludes me in my own garden. I find it very hard to transplant PCNs in the first place so I cannot buy a cultivar whose picture I love and have it for any length of time in my garden. I am lucky if I see them bloom once and have not had them persist for year after year. For me, in my climate they perform as annuals or biennials.

That said, I can grow PCNs from seed and have one or rarely two years of bloom. For me the ideal cultivar would be a stable seed strain, not a clonal variation. Unfortunately the most spectacular flowers I have seen are all clones and I have not had seed strains that could reproduce the type of glories I see in catalogs.

Essentially the wild forms so much adored by Native Plant Societies are seed strains. And there is some diversity that seems constant. 'Valley Banner' I believe represents a strain that occurs in nature. But there have been limited attempts to establish seed strains. Roy Davidson had his Rosedown strain which is probably no longer extant. Carl Wyatt who used to live about 90 miles from me worked on a strain that would be glamorous yet more amenable to the Missouri climate. He had a very nice hillside of PCNs that he selected and reselected sowing anew every two years. He had success but moved away before introducing any varieties.



John Taylor seedling - photo John Taylor

Of course there may be other untried ways of having the spectacular flowers I lust for. I know of no serious attempts to cross PCNs with Louisiana Irises or

Iris virginica or a host of other species.

Of course these crosses may not be possible but it would be nice to see some serious efforts documented before jumping to that conclusion. And of course as far as I know there has been no attempt to induce tetraploidy in PCNs. Tetraploid PCNs might very possibly be crossed with other species that have also been converted. It would seem likely that a whole new race of PCN based plant might be created that could endure more varied garden conditions.

For those who can grow the PCNs easily there are still adventures to be had without such large efforts. One color effect I have seen in PCNs, that as far as I know has not been selected for, is iridescence. Everyone is familiar with peacock's feathers. Essentially this is a black



feather that has beautiful metallic sheens when the light is distorted by bouncing off the surface.

John Taylor seedling - photo John Taylor

Hummingbirds also often exhibit this type of coloring. Strong true greens, blues, and reds — all colors lacking in Irises— are possible through iridescence. Presently PCNs and Aril Irises have been the only Irises that seem to be a source of iridescence. The few PCNs where I have seen this have had small patches of iridescence in the signal area. I wish I could remember the individual varieties. Certainly it would seem to be something that could be worked on.

The possibilities we have are legion and should be able to occupy hybridizers for a very long time. I hope I live long enough to see many of these things develop.

Bob Pries

From the desk of the Secretary/CFO

Late winter 2017

Sometime during 2016, two of my computers began to die—and being contrary, each one ceased functioning in a completely different, yet subtle way. So subtle were they that it took me months to notice that new files and edits to old files weren't being saved.

I repeatedly entered data while thinking, all the time, hadn't I already done this? I created new files, including spreadsheets, documents, and databases, only to have them vanish. During the recovery phase, the computer technicians who saved files and installed them on my new computers lost several key files, including many that were new in 2016. And installed the rest improperly, so that it took yet another computer tech to straighten out that glitch. But all things pass.

The recovery process took more than two months. I have restored account accesses, found most of the old files, and begun the process of recreating new files that were lost during the past nine months. Yes. Nine months of increasing chaos straddled the seed sale and distribution of the latest issue of Pacific Iris. Not that there's a good time for this to happen, ever. The great news is that SPCNI's databases, financial and membership, came through, and I'm updating them as time permits.

All of this is a prelude to my key message: if you tried to contact me, or sent me messages, or had online transactions with SPCNI's PayPal account during this period, yet did not hear from me, it was probably lost as my computers destabilized. I apologize to everyone who may have been inconvenienced by this. Be patient. Contact me again to confirm messages got through.

As we become more digital, it is important to remember to keep your email addresses current with SPCNI. It's our default communication method now, as more than ninety percent of members have email addresses. However, this doesn't work if we do not have a valid address for you! [Or if I don't have a working computer at my end. : (]

Any time you want to confirm your membership details, send me an email and I'll tell you what we have—and you can tell me what should be there. In the past year, four members were moved to inactive status, because their emails, phones and/or postal addresses are not current.

Meanwhile, out in my garden, PCIs are budding up and getting ready to bloom. I have two long rock walls and three new plant beds to fill this year, so transplanting will commence soon. I've long wanted to see just how well this group of iris does in a rock garden/rock wall environment, and now I can! Happy gardening to all.

Email addresses related to SPCNI and me;

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Kathleen Sayce

Treasurer's Report

Income Statement 2016

Net Income \$1,314

| | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| Income | \$2,945 |
| Dues | 1005 |
| Donations | 10 |
| Interest | 5 |
| Seed Sales | 1924 |
| Expenses | \$1,610 |
| Office | 7 |
| Corporation | 20 |
| Fees | 83 |
| Medal | 35 |
| Postage | 599 |
| Printing | 771 |
| Web page | 115 |

Account Balances, 12/31/2016

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Total | \$16,958 |
| Checking | 4,803 |
| Savings | 6,827 |
| Lawyer Memorial | 3,536 |
| PayPal | 1,787 |

Kathleen Sayce

Periwinkle Persian: The Backstory

The 2016 Sydney B. Mitchell Medal, the highest award from the American Iris Society for Pacific Coast Iris has been won by Debby Cole. She tells of its origins.

Once upon a time, long ago and far away in a kingdom by the sea, it was winter and I was looking out the window, longing for spring. We had no snow, but it was cold and grey and wet and I was miserable. My eyes drifted lovingly to the seedling patch, from which several nice things had come, and halted. What was that new thing, with the lovely blue-green foliage?!? I hoped strongly that I would like its flower as well as I did the foliage--- and that it would bloom that spring, so I didn't die of waiting!



'Periwinkle Persian' - photo Jay and Terri Hudson

Spring came, and indeed, Lovely Foliage bloomed, with pert rippled blue-violet flowers, rather short. She grew and multiplied well, and the foliage remained lovely. A few more years passed. Jay and Terri Hudson at The Iris Gallery said, isn't there anything you'd like to send out here to guest for an upcoming convention? And I bit. As convention time approached, I was asked if I had registered Lovely Foliage. I thought, oh dear, that means a name. It's so floriferous and short, it just looks like a blue rug, but that would never do for a name.....

I grew 'Periwinkle Persian' from seed sent to the seed exchange by a gentleman in Oregon. It had never been listed, probably because of its uncertain parentage, but as seed chair at the time I got to see lots of strange things that the previous chair just hadn't been able to throw away. The donor had noted that this was obviously a dwarf douglasiana, but that there was something else in the mix that lent a delightful rippling to the petals. He didn't indicate where he'd collected the seed. He was no longer a member, but when I scoured the old membership data and tried calling him, I was told the phone had been disconnected, and I could find no further trace of him through the internet.



'Periwinkle Persian' - photo leonineiris.com

Is there a lesson here? Should we perhaps have a category in the Seed Exchange for Strange and Wonderful Stuff (or maybe Interspecies Hybrids....), rather than just filing it under one species or another? Many hybridizers get unhappy when faced with intros of unknown parentage, let alone parents of unknown species, because they have no clue what to plan on. Many things from such seed are lovely, and this one I thought too nice to keep to myself. I never in my wildest dreams imagined it would take the Mitchell Medal.

Debby Cole

As others see us

Lance Wright is a retired gardener from Portland who blogs at [GardenRiots- Horticultural Forays Into a Changing Urban World](#). He recently posted about his professional experiences with Pacific Coast Iris.

Gardening is no more or less subject to the vagaries of fad and fashion than the other activities we dabble in. Marketers prey on us, luring us with plants possessing new and alluring characteristics, promises of larger flowers, more disease resistant, floriferous, more exotic or environmentally responsible, less maintenance intensive... the list goes on. Gardening is a very personal endeavor and as such we will always be subject to such siren calls. There will be the righteous amongst us convinced of their own focused vision who seem to be immune (but what, we might ask, are they missing?) and there will be those who simply surrender completely to the beauty and bounty around them, making themselves easy prey. In the long run, who is to say who is right? Our knowledge is imperfect and we are weak.... The act of gardening strengthens us, provides us with the opportunity to learn and in so doing puts us into relationship with the living world around us. We become better gardeners capable of making better, though still imperfect, decisions. Whether we garden to augment our own diets with what we grow or are trying our hand at healing a small piece of a damaged earth, or building a place of respite for ourselves and friends or trying to model 'right' behaviour for our children and neighbors, we are out in our gardens and landscapes learning something of how incredibly complex this earth is...and that is all good.

Genus Iris has not escaped the focused intentions of hybridizers, teasing botanical performances from their charges that can be found no where in nature. Whole catalogs extoll the virtues of Border, Short, Mid and Tall Bearded, Japanese, Siberian, Louisiana, Spuria and various other such 'creatures' all flaunting combinations and extremes of color and unique or oversized floral structures, often exotic and flamboyant!

Within this world of Iris is a series that we really should pay attention to, the species and subspecies native to the western coast of North America, the Iris series Californicae (There are 16 other series within genus Iris that are comprised of species sharing DNA and, with it, a particular history of development and the physical characteristics that go along with it.). Several of these have overlapping ranges and, where this occurs, it is possible to find hybrids. These are precocious plants and if hybridizers needed any encouragement in pursuing these, this would seal the deal. If you look you would soon discover that there is a committed following to these iris and their hybrids. The hybridizers have been busy over the years, though their production has been on a more regional scale and while they are generally not of the same physical stature of their many hybrid cousins, the Pacific Coast Iris are supremely well suited jewels for our gardens.



'Survivor's Son' bloomed heavily in May of '15 growing shaded beneath a Chinese Windmill Palm along my parking strip. The flowers are smaller than many hybrids, but are very numerous.

I am a horticulturist and gardener. Like you, I try to do the best I can with the resources available. When I was still a gardener working in Parks my imperatives were threefold: to do so responsibly given my sites, budget and public need; second, that my work be 'beautiful' especially given that in austere times beauty is often sacrificed leaving utility alone which is insufficient; and third, that my work be educational in itself to help 'wake' people up to the possibilities we have as residents of a truly incredible region.

When I choose plants, I try, but it's difficult, to keep in mind their places of origin. Right plant. Right place. This is absolutely vital when trying to produce a xeric low water use landscape. Sometimes I draw from a long list of what I call 'West Coasties' which includes not only our native Valley flora but much from southern Oregon and California flora as well. Other times I expand that list to include the other mediterranean regions of the world which occur on the west coasts of the continents at roughly the same latitude north or south. I love pretty. And I find that very often by choosing plants that come from similar regions and niches, that have been 'shaped' by like conditions, they 'play well together'.



Pacifica Iris species in bloom on a ridge top in California's Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve

To do this takes time spent gardening in one place while at the same time looking to other areas that share similar conditions. You begin to make connections. It is a learning process and it is based on what nature herself has done over millennia. We have to ask ourselves where, in a broad and deep sense, do we garden? Then can we make wise choices that can serve several purposes.



'Pacific Rim' with very delicate flowers, a smaller and less robust hybrid growing in a drier and shadier part of my parking strip.

We live in the Holarctic Floristic Kingdom, the largest by far of the six such world Kingdoms. Each Kingdom is distinct and can be mapped out on the ground. Each contains a shared flora that can be used to define it. The Holarctic includes roughly all the northern latitudes north of the Tropic of Cancer at 23.5deg. up to the north pole. This was not an arbitrary decision while made puzzling over a map. It contains a number of plant families and genera, like the species Iris, that are endemic, or occur in none of the other Kingdoms. To walk the lands of one's Kingdom would lead to a botanical familiarity that is 'comforting'. This is not to say that you wouldn't come across plants that were unknown to you. Kingdoms are defined broadly.



'Drive You Wild' Joe Ghio's 1985 introduction

More usefully, we live within the Rocky Mountain Floristic Region, which includes everything west of the Great Plains to the Pacific and from the San Francisco Bay area north to Kodiak Island Alaska, excluding the Great Basin and much of the interior Canadian portion. Regions have a higher degree of species consistency that would be reflected in the plant populations within its various types of landscape, forests, woodlands, savannah, meadow, riparian, marsh or open water areas. Our region contains the greatest diversity of conifers in the world. It too has many endemic genera including *Sidalcea*, *Tellimia*, *Tolemia* and *Vancouveria*. Other genera like the *Castilleja*, the Paintbrushes, have their major center of diversity here.

The Vancouver Floristic Province lies within this Region between the Pacific and the Cascades while the California Floristic Province lies to its south divided by an ill defined border.

Such plant species and genera as *Sequoia sempervirens*, *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, *Darlingtonia californica*, *Vancouveria* and *Whipplea* are endemic to it. Also resident here are the Californicae series of *Iris*, sometimes referred to as the Pacificas. These too are endemic and they are little jewels. While all *Iris* species (there are 260) are northern temperate residents, members of the Holarctic, Pacifica iris species have narrow and precise requirements that limit them to the Mediterranean west coast of North America. Beardless, these species all share wiry rhizomes and roots and have long, narrow, mostly evergreen leaves that present a 'grassy' effect when compared to the broader blades and fans of many others. The entire structure is fibrous, the leaves persistent. All are low in stature relative to other species.

Iris tenuis and *Iris missouriensis* occur here as well, but they are not part of this particular series likely sharing more of their history with other *Iris* than with these. These *Iris* deserve a place in every West Coast garden.

Pacificas, having originated here, are uniquely suited to our region. Gardeners in other parts of the country must take extraordinary measures to get these to perform or simply survive. Other places are too hot or wet in summer and too cold in winter, sometimes a combination of all three. While I've heard of others having trouble with these here I never have. I don't know what might be wrong with their site conditions. Most of the species can be found in California with fewer native in Oregon generally occurring in open woodlands and along forest edges. By the time you move to the Puget Sound area even *Iris tenax* becomes rare. Temperature is a factor.

Growers have also found that heavy wet soils can be their death. Pay attention to drainage. They seem to thrive in open coniferous forest (remember that evergreens suck up water year round). Alternatively plant them on slopes where they will get surface runoff or mix in pumice or 1/4-10 gravel. Give them some sun for best bloom, but avoid the baking afternoon sun for most of these.

Iris douglasiana is a coastal species. Prior to our interference you rarely saw it out of sight of ocean. It is evergreen and vigorous, but not as tolerant of the drier and warmer conditions inland. Keep this in mind when you site it. It is beautiful. I have planted it at the top of the bank in a few places along South Waterfront and more recently at Riverplace Esplanade. It gets afternoon shade so it is not so severely tested.

This species is a common component of many of several hundred named hybrid cultivars. The species is larger than most in the series, it is fully evergreen and is a robust clumper. These characteristics have proven desirable amongst hybridizers. 'Canyon Snow' is a white form, others range from light blue-violet to dark purple; occasionally white, rarely yellow. Many of its cultivars have been crossed with other more interior species and have been proven to be much more tolerant of inland conditions. One, 'Montara', exhibits a very different color palette with its gorgeous russets and golds and evergreen foliage. Montara Mountain, its

namesake, is at the south end of the San Francisco peninsula and is home to a large native stand of *I. douglasiana*. This plant has done reasonably well for me on a south facing parking strip which would have been a poor spot for the species. It received some protection from heat and sun by its neighbors but began to decline more as a result of root competition with its neighbors compelling me to move it to a more easterly location where it has thrived.



'Montara', a 1983 introduction from Joe Ghio

One of the most prolific hybridizers of PCIs has been Joseph Ghio, who began as a teenager in '54 and is still working with over 350 named hybrids...this doesn't count the bearded and other Iris he works with. Others have produced hybrids as well including Terry Aitken, the owner of Aitken's Salmon Creek Nursery, just north of Vancouver, WA, who is still producing and selling Iris other than the Pacificas. Hybridizing has been occurring for a long enough period that many hybridizers rely on early hybrids for parent material rather than using original species stock. There may still be reason to go back to the 'source' as several species have characteristics that may not be 'represented' in the gene pool now popularly being utilized. Several have distinct populations in their natural range with variation in flower and form of the plant. Our own *Iris tenax*, the predominant representative in Oregon into southern Washington, is sometimes known as the 'rainbow Iris' due to its many

color forms. Perhaps as the West Coast gardening public becomes more aware of their value and adaptability more of these will be brought back into production. In the meantime a visit to Ghio's Bay View Gardens nursery should be on everyone's list when in the Santa Cruz area. Ghio is a great example of what persistence, passion and attention to detail can produce when working with a species with such potential.

Do not disturb! Should I say it again? Wait until the fall or spring rains come and root growth initiates. This is important. Dig your plants for division after the rains begin. Then pot up your divisions and protect them. This brings us to the second caveat, young plants in pots are not as cold hardy as your established clumps.



'Simply Wild' floating above Geranium 'Lawrence Flatman'.

There are two caveats when working with Pacificas: first, because they are adapted to our summer dry conditions and go dormant then...leave them alone! Unlike many other plants you don't want to 'mess' with these during their summer dormancy. This is contrary to many herbaceous perennials which you divide during their Fall dormancy and even some other Iris, that are commonly divided in summer after blooming... but not these.

Protect them or risk losing all of them, this is a major production problem locally if the grower is unable to protect their pots during our sudden cold snaps. Protect your new plantings in the ground with a mulch. Then leave them for a few years before you divide again. The rhizomes of PCIs grow at the soil surface and are vulnerable to cold damage especially if they are newly planted out. Also, don't bury them in the soil when you plant to 'protect' them from the cold!

On one of my old downtown Portland sites, Friendship Circle, at the west end of the Steel Bridge, I had planted a mixture of the hybrids, 'Simply Wild', 'Drive You Wild' and 'Native Warrior', all three are evergreen with varying amounts of velvety red, burgundy and darker, with gold and or cream. All three are Ghio hybrids and Mitchell Award winners. Unfortunately Yellow Nutsedge got started in the bed. One summer I left its care to a mostly unmonitored seasonal worker who failed to see the Nutsedge. By the time I discovered it the Nutsedge was flowering and I spent several hours, late in the summer, trying to extract it. I should have waited until Fall, dug the entire area and separated out the Iris from the then ubiquitous Nutsedge and its nutlets, or simply tossed it all and started over, but I didn't. I lost most of the Iris to root disturbance in the process...and the nutsedge remained.

At South Waterfront Garden, next to Montgomery Circle is a triangular bed full of 'Simply Wild'. Elsewhere in the garden can be found 'Blue Moment', 'Sea Admiral' and 'Drive You Wild'. Along the esplanade is *Iris tenax* 'Oregon Waterfall' and further south toward the Marquam Bridge is more *Iris douglasiana* as well as 'Big Money'.

One of the first Pacificas, 'Native Warrior', that I planted in Parks is on the corner of Main and 4th under some elms. It's a little too shady but they bloom well enough. They receive regular summer irrigation but the elms draw off a lot of the extra summer moisture. 'Big Money' occupies the south end of the dry bed in the South Park Blocks next to Jefferson St across from the Art Museum. These grow in a pumice amended soil topped with 1/4 10 gravel and, because they are on an irrigation station shared with plants that want more water, have low flow nozzles covering the area. Separating the system would have been cost prohibitive given all of the piping and wires beneath the hard surfaces. Others like 'Canyon Snow' have been scattered hither and yon in a variety of Parks. All perform well, are beautiful and fill the area without fuss. While not 'native' in the strictest sense they are trustworthy performers for our conditions and provide more color and presence than our local, tried and true resident, *Iris tenax*, which is still a valuable component along the woodland edge.



Joe Ghio's 1996 introduction 'Trancas'

Propagation by division is fairly simple and, provided your timing is right, you will have a high rate of success. Their rhizomes are narrow, tough and stringy, necessitating that they be cut. Breaking won't work as the rhizome will likely tear leaving more raw exposed tissue that is subject to rot. When I divide I leave at least half of the plant in the ground undisturbed and make fairly large clumps of the rest which requires cleaning away most of the soil from them. I'm not going for numbers as much as a blooming plant with higher survivability.

By extension, it is best to plant when they are in active growth so that they can become established before the stress of summer drought settles in. Remember that summer dormancy means no root growth. Fall rains bring the initiation of root growth. Winter cold seems to work as a signal for the plant to begin the growth of new foliage and flowering as temperatures rise in the spring foliage occurring first. I've never seen either the repeat flowering or the growth of new foliage here in the Fall that some summer drought stressed plants undergo with the onset of Fall rains. All of the plants I've grown have been mid-late spring bloomers. In the ground they need little supplemental water after establishment unless you are stressing them in a really hot location, though they will tolerate it with good drainage. I don't bother with deadheading; in fact I do very little, other than occasionally dividing them.



'Big Money' - Another of Joe Ghio's irises doing well in Portland.

As evergreens there is a normal annual loss of leaves. In a typical 'cold' winter I do get more foliage dieback. Sometimes over half of a clump may appear dead and brown. The leaves are persistent and do not easily fall or pull away, remember those fibers. Over time they shrivel and curl. Attempting to pull them away too vigorously may dislodge their roots.

In the Spring, where the dead leaves are older and 'crispier', these will form a 'skirt' around the perimeter and to a lesser degree within the clump, and can be pulled or broken off without damaging or tearing loose the plants. The more persistent of these I simply grab and cut low with scissors. Dec. '09 brought more than the normal dieback and I was less careful cutting back, removing some of the still green as well, just as the flush of new Spring growth was beginning. They take this in stride. If you choose to cut them hard, do so before they push their new spring growth otherwise this will weaken the plants forcing them to expend more energy 'regrowing' their foliage. This grooming isn't absolutely necessary as the flush of Spring growth will eventually visually dominate.

While some gardeners may see these as having limited value in the garden due to their relatively short bloom period and their lack of re-blooming, they fit in well in the 'native' garden or where the gardener has done more of a matrix style of planting so that other plants can 'carry' the aesthetic load helping to extend season of interest. As a big fan of this group I have used them even in more 'tropical' themed plantings. I look forward to their blooming every Spring!

Their foliage can also serve as a good foil for larger growing members of the garden providing presence throughout the year. It will be interesting to see how they perform in the mass plantings recently made on the eastern approach to Portland's new Sellwood Bridge, a very exposed site without help of a mixture of other plant material. Such a planting could suffer aesthetically should they fail even in part. I've no idea which variety these are. Native suppliers produce *Iris douglasiana* in larger quantities so I think it might likely be that, remembering that this species is more coastal and less tolerant of exposed inland conditions.

Lance Wright

New Members

Gazit Adler, Haifa, Israel
Peter Berry, Tauranga, New Zealand
Joe Burgon, Chula Vista, CA, USA
Emeline Chartier, Us en Vexin, France
Ginette Chin, Bothell, WA, USA
Joseph Clark, Lake George, CO, USA
Richard Cypher, Duncan BC, Canada
Jody Estes, Seattle, WA, USA
Dana Fetty, Norfolk, VI, USA
Sue Hammond, Redlands, CA, USA
Elena Hofferber, Riverside, CA, USA
Lyn James, Palmerston, New Zealand
Kevin Kobielus, Bothell, WA, USA
Margot Latham, Calabasas, CA, USA
Tohru Mamiya, Kakamigahar City, GIFU, Japan
Justina May, El Dorado, CA, USA
Mika Oldham, Clifton, Banbury, Oxfordshire, UK
Calvor Palmateer, Victoria BC Canada
Alba Barretta Pere, Nueva Palmira, Colonia, Uruguay
Kay Shapiro, Urbandale, Iowa, USA
Marthan Stripling, Lafayette, CA, USA
Brenda Wood, Watsonville, CA USA
Eugene Zielinski, Prescott Valley, AZ, USA



'Pacific Snowflake' - photo Lance Wright

Seed Pool

This year, the seed pool donors consisted of Kathleen Sayce, Debby Cole, Bob Sussman, and Ken Walker, the latter being new this year.

Ken's seeds were specific crosses that he'd never seen bloom - so there was the mystery factor for anyone interested in growing them.

Kathleen and Debby have been very generous with the Seed Exchange - especially in terms of sending in species type seeds.

Bob is always receiving mystery seed that he's happy to pass along with his southern climate success stories. Unfortunately, some of the previous regulars have retired from the work of collecting, drying, packing and shipping seeds to me, but I hope to pick up a few more people who will be willing to help us out.

Garry Knipe was unable to assist last year, but hopes to be able to send in some favorites for the next pool.

Louise Guerin

Editor's note:

The SPCNI seed pool is the way we can effectively gain new members, and spread the word about the beauty of Pacific Coast Native Iris.

There are two important components to its continuing success, and therefore the growth of the Society. The first is the need for seed—if you grow in the United states, collecting seed and sending it to the seed pool is the most effective thing you can do to support our sustainability. For those of us away from the US, it is the only way that many of us can get access to these plants, as import controls on plant issue have hardened up over the years.

Secondly, if you can help with processing the seeds it would lighten the burden on the few who are currently doing the work. Contact details are available in the boilerplate at the front of Pacific Iris.

Have a great growing and seed harvesting season!

Gareth Winter

Joe Ghio's new seedlings



A mixture of Joe Ghio's seedlings from the Bay View Gardens Facebook page

Joe Ghio recent introductions



*The 2017
introduction,
'Take the Red
Eye'.*



*Tour de
California*

John Taylors latest seedlings—part one



John Taylors latest seedlings—part two

