



Society for Pacific Coast Native Irises

Almanac



Top: *Iris x noti*, story page 5

Middle: 'Drip Drop' and 'Patchy Fog'

Bottom: 'Bay Street' and 'Ocean Blue'

Front cover: 'Pretty Boy' seedling, from <http://photobucket.com/images/Pacific+coast+iris+seedling+of+Pretty+Boy/>

Photo: Leonine Nursery

Photos: Kathy Braaten

Photos: Kathy Braaten

Photo: Karen Jacobs

Almanac of the Society for Pacific Coast Native Irises

Volume XXXX, Number 2, Spring 2012

SPCNI MEMBERSHIP

The Society for Pacific Coast Native Irises (SPCNI) is a section of the American Iris Society (AIS).

Membership in AIS is recommended but not required for membership in SPCNI.

	US	Overseas
Annual, paper	\$15.00	\$18.00
Triennial, paper	\$40.00	\$48.00
Annual, digital	\$7.00	\$7.00
Triennial, digital	\$19.00	\$19.00

Lengthier memberships are no longer available.

Please send membership fees to the SPCNI Treasurer.

Use Paypal to join SPCNI online at <http://pacificcoastiris.org/JoinOnline.htm>, international currencies accepted

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FROM THE SECRETARY/TREASURER ABOUT DUES NOTICES

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

Members who get digital copies will get an email message after receiving the last issue.

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

AMERICAN IRIS SOCIETY

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

<http://www.irises.org/member.htm>.

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

Phone and fax: 386-277-2057 E-mail: aismemsec@irises.org

MEMBERSHIP RATES, AIS

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

PLEASE ADVISE SPCNI & AIS OF ANY CHANGE OF ADDRESS

ALMANAC DEADLINES: March 15 and September 15.

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

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President, Bob Sussman

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

First Vice President, Michael Monninger

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

Second Vice President, Position open

Immediate Past President, Debby Cole

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

Secretary-Treasurer, Kathleen Sayce

PO Box 91, Nahcotta, WA 98637
(360) 665-5292 e-mail: ksayce@willapabay.org

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Editor, Gareth Winter

64 Michael Street, Masterton, New Zealand 5810
(00646) 377-5373 e-mail: wintergareth53@gmail.com

Historian/Archivist, Richard Richards

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

Recorder, Kenneth Walker

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

Seed Distribution, Emma Elliott

24000 S Schuebel School Rd Beaver Creek, Oregon 97004
(503) 632-2338 e-mail: seedex@pacificcoastiris.org

Trek Chairman, Position open

Web Manager, Steve Ayala

929 Pepperwood Lane, Petaluma CA 94952
(707) 778-6025 e-mail: stevayla@sonic.net

ALMANAC REPRESENTATIVES

Canada, Position open

Washington, Position open

Oregon, Kenneth Hixson

88316 Thienes Lane, Springfield, OR 97478
(503) 747-4506 e-mail: kennethhixson@gmail.com

Northern California, Kathy Braaten

10288 Kenwood Drive, Grass Valley, CA 95949
(530) 477-2811 e-mail: katbrat@cebridge.net

Southern California, Michael Monninger

(see above contact information)

Central U.S., Position open

Eastern U.S., David Schmieder

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

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM THE SPCNI TREASURER

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

PRINT ARTICLES

Check List of named PCI species and cultivars, 2005

Lists species and named cultivars and hybrids to 2005. \$9.00

If ordering both print and CD checklist versions together, \$14.00

A Guide to the Pacific Coast Irises

Victor A. Cohen, 1967

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

A Revision of the Pacific Coast Irises Lee W. Lenz,

1958 Reprint of Aliso journal article 5.5x8.5, 72 pages. \$8.00

Hybridization and Speciation in the Pacific Coast Irises

Lee W. Lenz, 1959. Reprint of Aliso article 72 pages, \$8.00

If ordering both of Dr Lenz's reprints, \$14.00

Diseases of the Pacific Coast Iris

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

Almanac Index, 2005,

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

COMPACT DISCS

SPCNI Photo CD, 2009.

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

SPCNI Almanac CD, 2009.

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

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

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

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

A 15-minute presentation with a concise overview of PCN species, early hybridizers, Mitchell Award and Medal winners, gardens landscaped with PCIs, and culture tips.

Ready to play for individuals or groups, \$9.00

USERS GROUP ON YAHOO:

SPCNI has a users group site at

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

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Editor's desk	3
President's Message	4
Farewell Debby Cole	4
The Hunt for the Noti Iris Kenneth Hixson	5
Seed Exchange update Emma Elliott	9
New members	10
Seeking the Holy Grail Gareth Winter	11
To soak and grind or not, that is the question Kathleen Sayce	13
List of nurseries	19
Collecting PCI seeds Emma Elliott	21
Report from Northern California Kathy Braaten	22



A 'Canyon Snow' x 'With this Ring'
seedling from Bob Sussman

From the Editor's desk

Gareth Winter

April is a time of mellow fruitfulness here in Masterton. The spring, with its thousands of iris blooms, seems a long time ago, but we still have a reminder or two of what has passed, and what will come again. A few clumps of PCIs have responded to what has been a climatically odd year by throwing a succession of autumn blooms. At the moment I have three or four different clones, most of them over five years old, with flowers. The Pacific region has been under the influence of a La Nina, meaning disrupted weather patterns. Here in New Zealand we had a very mild winter, with bitterly cold outbreaks from the polar regions, followed by a mild and moist spring and summer. Flowering was up to two weeks early in our area, and I know other regions had similarly disrupted flowering seasons.

This is our last Almanac - under that name at least. As from our next issue we will be 'Pacific Iris', a title we feel is a bit snappier and will help us expand our readership. We are hoping to make some style changes as well, and look forward to your feedback on these changes. Remember - this is your journal, and we are keen to have your input. Reports from members are an important part of the journals of many of our fellow Iris societies, and give a great guide to the way various species and cultivars succeed in different regions. Kathy Braaten has taken over as our North Californian representative, and her first report is on page 22. She has also contributed some photographs of cultivars she enjoyed last year. We are keen to add more colour photographs to 'Pacific Iris', so get your camera out this spring and take as many photographs as you can!

We have some very interesting stories this issue - Kenneth Hixson's account of his on-going search for the hybrid *Iris x noti* is covered, and Kathleen Sayce reports on her experiments on germination among PCIs. Emma Elliott, Seed Distribution chair, has contributed a good reminder about saving seed, as well as a report on her overwhelming success with the seed pool. Any offers of help for her will be gratefully received! I also had the chance to have a chat with Australian John Taylor, best known in the iris world as a Louisiana iris breeder. He has also been working with PCIs, and tells us about some of his breeding goals. Fascinating stuff.

Enjoy the spring/autumn and think about how you can help make 'Pacific Iris' a great new step for the Society.



President's Message

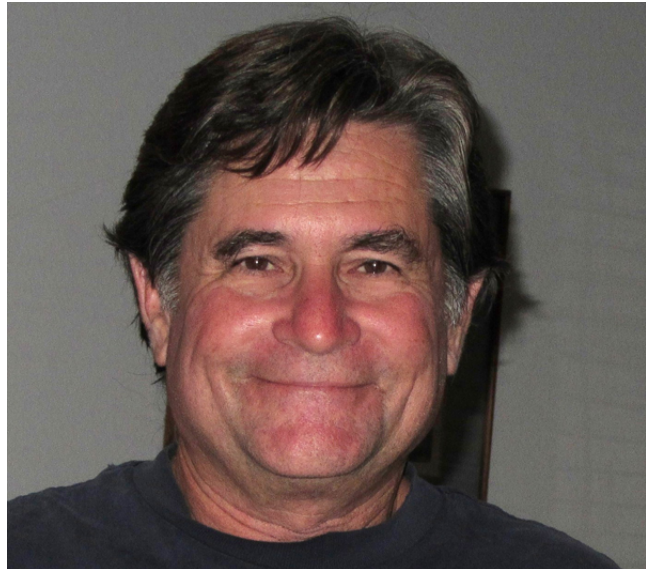
We have concluded 2011 and those of us who garden in the Northern Hemisphere are now entering spring of 2012.

Lots of good and encouraging things are happening within our Society. We are continuing to serve our members better and have even managed to have a bit more money in the bank account as well. A lot of the improvement is because we've gone more "digital". Having members switch to the digital Almanac has saved a lot of money on both printing and postage. The Seed Exchange went "online" and this has resulted in record sales. Much of this has been due to the hard work of both Kathleen Sayce, Secretary-Treasurer, and Emma Elliot, our Seed Exchange Chair. At least partly due to the success of our on-line seed exchange system, membership is up too.

We also now have some social media exposure both in a chat room and on Facebook allowing members and non-members to ask questions and discuss growing Pacific Coast Native Irises. Several members of the group have also aided in the accumulation of pictures of various hybrids, many of which are historic, as well as passing this information to the American Iris Society. We are working on a new website too, thanks to Steve Ayala.

As I am typing away we are getting ready for the next AIS convention in Ontario, California. Ken Walker, our Registrar, is working on the group's presentation. Debby Cole, Past President, has put together a mini-trek right at the end of this year's AIS convention, taking participants to the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden where we are looking forward to seeing some of Dr. Lenz's creations. After that we will welcome you to our Matilija Nursery, in beautiful Moorpark, California for tons of Pacific Coast Native Irises in bloom.

This will be that last this journal comes to you with this title. As we look to expand membership of the society and



readership of the Almanac, we have decided to rename it Pacific Iris: Almanac of the Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris, at Gareth Winter's suggestion. The name change will apply with the next edition.

Enjoy the spring and take lots and lots of pictures!!!!

Bob Sussman

FAREWELL

Debby Cole

We note with sadness the passing of botanist Dr. John Weiler in September 2011 at age 86. Best known for his work with reblooming bearded irises, especially the standard dwarfs, John also registered and introduced three Pacific Coast irises: 'Chief Sequoia,' which was awarded the Mitchell Medal in 1999, 'Western Bluebird,' winner of an Award of Merit in 1997, and 'Blue Cockatiel.' His efforts with the Californicae focused on improving their survivability in hostile environments like that of his home in California's Central Valley, and he contributed several articles in that regard to the Almanac.

The Hunt for the Noti Iris

This is a detective story. Not the kind with villains, or guns blazing; there are neither beautiful damsels in distress nor treasure to be grabbed. Rather, this is a story of how one person learned some things that might be useful for you, should you undertake a similar quest.

Kathleen Sayce thought it would be desirable to have updated information about the various Pacific Coast iris species and varieties. Since I live close to the area where the 'Noti iris', known for over 50 years to lovers of Pacific Coast native iris, was found, she and Debby Cole urged me to try to find something called it. When first asked to take on this assignment, my reaction was "I'd rather not." I do not pretend to be a botanist, and the little botany I did have was long ago. So this is not a scientific study, but an amateur's search.

Noti iris: The Background

Noti is a small town west of Eugene, Oregon. A wild iris is found near there which differs from the surrounding *Iris tenax*, and is now believed to be a stabilized natural hybrid of *I. chrysophylla* and *I. tenax*. It has been suggested that it is a form of *Iris chrysophylla*, and the AIS Iris Encyclopedia lists it that way, but it is a hybrid, rather than a form of a species. The parent species (*chrysophylla* and *tenax*) cross readily where their habitats allow them to grow close together. This hybrid cross has occurred naturally several times, usually where man's activities has changed the environment by fire, road building, logging, etc. So, what's so special about the Noti hybrid?

The Noti iris was described about fifty years ago. Things have changed since then. In this area of western Oregon, Douglas firs, *Pseudotsuga menziesii*, have been logged on a sixty year rotation, meaning they reach a trunk diameter of 25-30 inches before being cut, and stands of trees grow to the height and density of a mature forest. If the Noti iris grew in areas of Douglas fir stands, the iris could have been shaded out in the

past sixty years. Houses have been built, fields plowed, animals grazed. Even the road used in Clarkson's time has been straightened, so his phrase "on the road to Noti" no longer means what it did. There are still wild iris around the Noti area, mostly, and iris are long-lived, but does this specific iris even still exist?

Another consideration is the iris generation cycle (e.g., from flower to seed to flowering plant), which is about five years in the wild. With fifty years since the original report for this population, or about ten generations, a hybrid might have changed dramatically.

These considerations were abruptly set aside when an internet search turned up six pictures labeled '*Iris x noti*' (literally, "Iris from Noti") posted to the SIGNA (Species Iris Group of North America) database on June 3, 2008. They illustrated exactly the characteristics originally ascribed to the Noti hybrid. Being posted in 2008 did not necessarily mean the pictures were taken in 2008, but it did imply the iris still existed very recently. Unfortunately, they were posted "anonymously" so it is not possible to contact the person who posted them.

The Noti hybrid apparently became known when Delora (Smith) Thompson of Eugene, Oregon brought it to the attention of Quentin Clarkson, presumably sometime after his PhD dissertation was written in 1955 while he was at Oregon State College (now Oregon State University). Clarkson's dissertation described three colonies of hybrids between *Iris chrysophylla* and *Iris tenax* as part of a study funded by the National Science Foundation on relationships between species of Pacific Coast iris. Clarkson reported on the Noti iris four years later in *Northwest Science*, in 1959, and again in 1961. Roy Davidson wrote articles for the SPCNI Almanac in 1982 and 1987. George Gessert commented on this hybrid cross in several articles in the Almanac (for example see "Breeding with *Iris chrysophylla*"), but little has been written in recent years.

Noti iris: The Identification

According to Clarkson the Noti hybrid did not receive a botanical name as it is not widespread, does not occupy an ecological niche distinct from its parent *Iris tenax*, and is surrounded geographically by *I. tenax*. Divisions of the Noti iris were collected, have been offered for sale (by Laurie's Garden for instance) and have circulated among iris growers to some extent. It is referred to in the horticultural trade as 'notiensis', *Iris notiensis*, or even *I. chrysophylla* var. *notiensis*, but none of these is appropriate - botanical protocol dictates that a plant not be referred to as a species or subspecies until valid publication has been completed. As things stand currently, it should be named only as *Iris x noti*, or just "the Noti hybrid." The plant could be named and registered with the American Iris Society's registry if deemed worthy, as has happened with 'Valley Banner', a different hybrid of (*I. chrysophylla* x *I. tenax*).

I first became aware of the name "notiensis" in about 1977, in a pricelist for Lorena Reid's nursery. I looked for this iris in a casual way, without success, whenever I was in the Noti area, for a number of years. I did not know where to look or even exactly what I was looking for, as I had not seen a description that would differentiate the hybrid from the more prevalent *I. tenax*.

On other occasions, and in other areas, I had mistaken hybrids of the same cross as *I. tenax*, only to be told that they were not, although the people correcting me were unable to explain why the plant I was looking at was not pure *Iris tenax*.

Searching for wildflowers has changed since "the good old days." Then, you either started out in the field, just looking to see what could be seen, then trying to identify whatever was found, or in a herbarium looking at dead plants brought in from "the field".

My search began by trying to find information, particularly on how to distinguish the hybrid from the surrounding parent, *I. tenax*. Because the Noti hybrid differed in flower color from *I. chrysophylla*, and Clarkson had stated that no *I. chrysophylla* grew within fifteen miles of the hybrid, it was less important to identify its differences with that parent. I also hoped to find some idea of where to look, as many landmarks might have changed in fifty years.

Thanks to computers, and the availability of past Almanacs in scanned form, it is easily possible to search for what has been written about the Noti iris, and how it differed from other hybrids of crosses of the two parent species. Thanks to the internet, it is also possible to search for other articles written about this hybrid, including Quentin Clarkson's PhD dissertation, which described the characteristics of the hybrid that differentiate it from its two parent species.



Iris x noti Photo: SIGNA webpage

	<u><i>I. chrysophylla</i></u>	<u><i>I. x noti</i></u>	<u><i>I. tenax</i></u>
Petal width	1 cm	Similar to <i>tenax</i>	2-3 cm
Perianth tube length	5-12 cm	Similar to <i>chrysophylla</i>	1 cm or less
Flowering stem length	None, very close to ground	Similar to <i>chrysophylla</i>	40 cm or more
Flower color	Pale yellow or cream	Lavender, bluish or wine colored; more like <i>tenax</i>	Widely variable, from white, yellow and pink to blue and dark purple
Bract length	12-18 cm	Similar to <i>tenax</i>	3-5 cm
Bract shape	Lanceolate	Similar to <i>tenax</i>	Linear
Bract Position	Opposite	Similar to <i>chrysophylla</i>	Alternate
Bract angle to stem	Close to stem	Similar to <i>chrysophylla</i>	Angled out

(Chart courtesy of Kathleen Sayce)

Characteristics of the putative parent species include distinct traits as to petal width and length, flower stem lengths, and bracts, summarized in the above table, with Noti iris tendencies towards one or the other parent noted.

Iris chrysophylla tends to have yellowish green foliage (hence the name, 'yellow leaf iris'), sometimes with a greyish "bloom" on the leaves. Leaves tend to be somewhat sparse, not hiding the flowers which, having no flower stem, are held down low in the clump of leaves. *I. tenax* tends to have much longer leaves, often bright green or grayed green, and wider than *I. chrysophylla*. Its flower stems are tall enough for flowers to be seen over the tops of the leaves, which often bend down at the tips. Clumps are often larger and denser. *Iris tenax* tolerates herbaceous groundcover competition, often forty percent or more. *Iris chrysophylla* tolerates less than twenty percent groundcover. On the other hand, *I. tenax* tolerates no more than forty per cent shade (forest cover), meaning it requires some sunlight, while *I. chrysophylla* can tolerate 100 percent shade (forest cover). This means *I. tenax* can grow in "grass" but not in a mature forest. *I. chrysophylla* does not grow well in "grass" but can tolerate a forest's shading. The soil where the hybrid is found is reported as sandy loam with few rocks, characteristic of *I. tenax* habitats rather than of *I. chrysophylla*, which may be found on almost barren piles of rocks.

A major distinguishing characteristic of the Noti hybrid is that it tends to flower early, perhaps starting in March. This trait makes it potentially valuable to hybridizers wishing to extend the bloom season of today's PCI. Other hybrids of this same cross will flower after *I. tenax* (see George Gessert's articles), but

the Noti hybrid will have only a few flowers still open when *I. tenax* starts flowering in mid to late April. One of the pictures on the SIGNA site shows this trait well. In other words, the search is for an early-flowering iris, growing in the open or light shade with other plants, low growing, with flowers held close to the ground, a long perianth tube, bracts opposite, and lavender, bluish, or wine color flower. But where to find it?

Noti iris: The Search

It was also possible to determine an approximate current location where a physical search could begin. Internet searches on "Iris notiensis" and "Noti iris" yielded slightly different results. Searching with the name of the author, Quentin Clarkson, led to a couple of articles. Clarkson's PhD dissertation is available on-line. His dissertation and articles were cited by several other authors, whose names in turn were searched for more information.

Widening the search to "Hybrids of *Iris chrysophylla* and *I. tenax*" brought up more information. Clarkson made reference to *I. chrysophylla*, stating that it did not now grow closer than fifteen miles to *I. x noti*. A search for locations of *Iris chrysophylla* in the online Oregon Flora Project (OFP) was next (<http://www.oregonflora.org/atlas.php>). The OFP is maintained by the Herbarium at Oregon State University, with a stated goal of being "a comprehensive resource for the vascular plants of Oregon that grow without cultivation, and to foster effective use of this knowledge by all citizens."

Searching OFP for "iris" brought a listing of names and thumbnails of eighty-eight images, including some of *I. chrysophylla* and *I. tenax*.

It does not list hybrids, so *I. x noti* is not displayed. There is a search box for a map showing dots for each reporting of a specified species. I selected a location for *Iris chrysophylla* nearest to the reported location of *I. x noti*, then "zoomed in" by clicking repeatedly on the spot. Eventually I found that this spot marked a location within a couple miles of where I had lived for twenty-five years – I had driven within a few hundred feet and had had no idea what was there. The map shows the roads around the plant, gives latitude and longitude to four decimal places, and gives altitude and precipitation. There are also options to overlay satellite images, terrain maps, Google™ street maps, and county boundary lines.

Quentin Clarkson's dissertation was typed on something called a typewriter. In the "good old days" it was necessary to use reference books and paper maps to locate an area; bring a camera and film to take pictures; then to take the film to a developer, pay to have it developed, and wait; and only then find out whether or not the pictures were clear and showed necessary details. Sharing the information could take weeks or months.

Now, laptop computers can go with a plant hunter into the field, access descriptions of plants, show a map with a dot showing the computer's current location, scroll the map in all four directions, get maps of roads in the area and directions from the present location to another location, view satellite maps, take pictures and send them around the world instantly, etc. A cellular telephone performs many of the same functions. It may have a GPS locator, it may provide maps from either GPS or the nearest cell phone towers, and may take and send digital pictures. Advanced digital cameras have GPS built in, and can even tell in which direction the camera is pointing. This information can be added to the picture, and with an internet connection such as with a cell phone, can instantly upload the picture, sending it anywhere the internet reaches. Whether the present technology is good or bad is a matter of opinion, but it greatly speeds up things for an amateur, and is a major change from the days when Quentin Clarkson studied *Noti iris*.

Noti iris: If found, what then?

During Clarkson's studies, the attitude generally was "If you can find it, you can have it." Finding uses for,
Spring 2012 Volume XXXX Number 2

or economic gain from, plants was regarded with favor. It was acceptable behavior to collect and grow plants collected from the wild. Clarkson's National Science Foundation grant was a reflection of the beginning awareness that the old practices might not still be acceptable.

As technology has changed, so also have attitudes and laws changed. Oregon has become more populated, the environment and native plants have gained importance, and "plant hunting", even seed collection from native plants, is now often regarded as undesirable, and some people find it is extremely unacceptable. Many governments, including Oregon's, are now responding to concerns of citizens and are passing increasingly restrictive laws about what plants may be picked or dug, and where – not within so many feet along roadways, not along streams, not on private property without permission, not in the national forests without permits, etc. Collecting flowers, plants, or seeds is now regarded as illegal except in special circumstances.

In some circumstances, landowners are required to protect populations of plants growing on their property, not necessarily for the plants themselves, but because they provide food for insects or birds, nesting sites, prevent erosion, or even to shade the streams that are fish habitat. Plant collectors may find themselves in the uncomfortable position of explaining to a judge why they were caught stealing from "the public", and judges are increasingly unsympathetic. In more rural, less populated areas the attitudes are usually more relaxed, but the laws do apply throughout the state.

As this is written, it is too early to commence the search for the *Noti iris* plants, as they aren't flowering yet – in fact, it was snowing a few minutes ago. I plan to try to find this hybrid, take photographs and data, and determine how it has fared over the last fifty years. Different hybrids from this same cross occur much closer to where I now live, and it will be interesting to see how they too can be differentiated from *I. tenax*. This is a different, if related, quest.

There is more to see, more to learn, so the quests will continue. Even without finding the *Noti iris*, I've learned a lot. I hope you, dear reader, have also learned something.

Kenneth Hixon, February 2012

Seed Exchange Update

Emma Elliot, Seed Distribution Chair

2011-12 Report: This was a big year for the SPCNI Seed Exchange. Not only was it my first year as Seed Exchange Chair but we also posted our seed list online for the first time. The online seed list included photos of pod parents and had links to PayPal so members could order seeds and pay online. It proved to be very popular, with 80% of all orders placed online.

With this change in place, the SPCNI seed exchange nearly doubled in a single year! We received orders from eight states and ten countries, attracted thirteen new members and mailed nearly 1,000 seed packets. PCI seeds are hard to find and I think we can expect the seed exchange to continue to grow in coming years.

Going Forward: It is clear that we will need more seed donations to meet the growing demand. With more seeds available, we will be able to fill more orders with first choices, send fewer substitutions and include more seeds per packet.

I invite all SPCNI members to collect and donate PCI seeds for next year's exchange. If you are a non-U.S. member and would like to donate seeds, I will mail you a Small Lots Import Permit that must accompany your seeds. For tips on how to collect and donate PCI seeds, see my article in this edition of the Almanac.

Help Wanted: It is also clear that the seed exchange cannot be published online, open to the public and grow at the current rate while continuing as a one-person operation. I am going to need help!

Assistant Seed Exchange Chairperson: We need a U.S. member to assist me with the seed exchange. I need someone who is available during the fall and winter months to help package and mail seeds and other related tasks. If you would consider this role, please contact me and we can discuss it in more detail.

Volunteers: There are also a number of tasks that could be completed by U.S. and international volunteers. No matter where in the U.S. you live, a domestic member could help package seeds. A tech-savvy domestic or international member could make seed packet labels on their computer and email the files to me. Also, if we have any members who are web designers, there are several ways we could improve our online seed list.

If you can volunteer for the seed exchange in any capacity, I would love to hear from you.



An example of the variety of plants grown from SPCNI seed

Photos: Gareth Winter

A warm welcome to new members

Our move to a more digitally aware society has paid dividends, with more members joining in the past six months than we have had for a long time. The on-line seed exchange has allowed us to connect with many more PCI growers, most of them potential members. We are delighted to share our knowledge and experience with them, and look forward to hearing from them about their experiences with Pacific Coast Native Irises.

Doug Wilson
1858 Michigan City Ln Nw
Salem, OR 97304
503-581-5880
dwilson-
ogconcollection@comcast.net

Heidi Kaster
34881 Hansville Rd
Kingston, WA 98346
dragonflyfarms@centurytel.net

Brock Heilman
7882 Mida Dr
Belleville, MI 48111
brockheilman@aol.com

Delane Langston
356 Scott St
Billings, MT 59101
bluebodyandpaint@yahoo.com

Bette Davis
969 Queen Anne Ct
El Dorado Hills, CA 95762-4129
boops38@hotmail.com

Jean Cox
Vacaville, CA 95688
707-448-0571
coxbijs@aol.com

Brent Dickerson
2762 St Albans Dr
Los Alamitos, CA 90720
pilttdown1@verizon.net

Arthur Goodwin
540 S Forest St Unit G
Denver, CO 80246
arthurgoodwin@netscape.com

Maureen Cosway
2 Cecil Place
Lytchett Matravers
Poole, Dorset BH16 6FG
United Kingdom
maureen.cosway@hotmail.co.uk

Chris Pepler
Ferendone House
Granary Yard
East Farndon LE16 9BS
United Kingdom
c.pepler@btinternet.com

Jonathan Starnes
Corning, CA 96021
jonathan530@gmail.com

Arkadiusz Knapik
Sikoskiego 31C/4
33300 Nowy Sacz
Poland
dexak@netscape.net

Gordon Tingley
714 Riverview Rd RR #1
Bear River, NS B0S 1B0
Canada
gordon@sleddinghill.ca

Takeyuki Namiki
4-4-48 Saginumadai
Narashino, Chiba 275-0015
Japan
nmkttakh@hotmail.co.jp

Sayaka Hori
15466 Los Gatos Blvd, Ste 109
PMB30
Los Gatos, CA 95032
ladysyk@yahoo.com

Gail Barth
Po Box 322
Oakbank, SA 5243
Australia
gebarth@bigpond.com

Merrilee Rambeau
3320 48th Ave CT N
Tacoma, WA 98422
merrilee@rambeau.net

Gail Jones
1619 Willowside Rd.
Santa Rosa, CA 95401
United States

Seeking the Holy Grail

Renowned Australian Iris breeder John Taylor has been turning his attention away from the Louisiana varieties he is internationally known for, and casting his eyes over the opportunities for working with PCIs. He already has some exciting results, and we were pleased to catch up with him recently.

Gareth: I am intrigued by the great results you have been getting with your recent PCNI breeding programme. Have you been working alone?

John: My brother-in-law, Graeme Grosvenor, and I have worked together on hybridizing for 40 years while we ran Rainbow Ridge Nursery. He has concentrated on Tall Beardeds and I on Louisiana iris (until the last few years) but it has largely been a joint effort all-round. We are now both retired however I help Graeme's daughter Sharon who now runs the nursery as and when she needs help.

It has been a difficult time since the beginning of March 2011 when Graeme took very ill and he is still only just starting to come good. Consequently, I have done all the hybridizing in 2011. We still have not shelled the 2011 PCNI seed pods and there are a lot to be done. In the 2010 season I lost most of the pollen parent details as the snails were in plague proportions and they destroyed most of the swing tags that I had used. In 2011, I did not have the time to do individual cross tags and I simply used a push in label to record the different pollen parents that I had used on the pod clumps. Obviously, the bees would have done some pollinating as well. Consequently, for the last couple of years only the pod parent is known with certainty.

Gareth: Where are you now based?

John: We live near Millthorpe which is a small village in what is called the Central Tablelands of New

South Wales at an altitude of around 960 metres. We are not far from the large regional towns of Orange and Bathurst, about 250 km west of Sydney. Winters are cold and frosty and we get a little snow as well. Summers are mild with very few really hot days. We had only one day above 30 this summer. The soil is a rich medium to heavy, slightly acid loam and although we have drip irrigation to all plants it has not been necessary to water at all this summer.

Gareth: Are you line breeding, and do you have any specific goals?

John: I am definitely line breeding and this approach is the major thrust of the breeding program although there is a twist in that the line breeding is primarily for the rounded ruffled form that both Graeme and I find most attractive. This has also been the thrust of my breeding approach to the Louisianas. Having said that, I place significant emphasis on developing larger standards to give a full appearance and I work to develop both blending and contrasting styles. Another interest is the attempt to put blue signals on a variety of colours.

Above all, however, is the search for good garden plants that are healthy, vigorous and produce plenty of erect spikes to carry the bloom in a graceful appealing manner.

Gareth: That is ambitious! Are you looking for specific colour patterns?

John: I love the plicata pattern and am trying to develop blue on white, purple on white and black on white although I have a long way to go on the latter. I have worked on yellow ground plicatas and am now getting pleasing results.

I am working on orange PCNIs and when British irisarian Sidney Linnegar visited last spring he

commented on the orange PCNIs. At this stage this project is in its infancy and work is needed to ensure good garden plants in this colour.

A particular favourite is the white and yellow combination or rather combinations, with the desire to develop blooms with rims and bands be they white on yellow or yellow on white. This project is well under way with the introduction of blue signals on yellow/white combinations to follow, hopefully, in the short term.

I have not seen a pure clear pink in PCNIs and this is another project, also in its infancy.

Gareth: What about the holy grail of iris breeding? Have you thought about a true red?

John: Pure red is only a dream as far as iris is concerned. I believe the Louisianas have the closest to a real red but I must admit that Graeme is getting close with some of his TBs, closer than anything I have seen from the US. I have a beautiful dark red PCNI (W50) which has frustratingly proved sterile (so far). It has lovely form but we need to get taller, more erect spikes. I believe that working the 'red' and 'orange' lines will see lighter, brighter reds in the near future with refinement to follow.

Gareth: What about other colours?

John: I particularly like the touches of green and turquoise we are getting on the apricots and tans and intend to continue to improve these colour gems. Many of the blended colours in PCNIs are particularly beautiful and deserve attention.

Shades of blue (and purple) are not difficult to obtain in all iris but I am yet to see a rounded ruffled sky blue in the PCNIs. This is not something I am specifically working on but I believe it will come out as a by-product in the next few years. I find the neglecta pattern most attractive and Graeme has some lovely TB neglectas particularly in darker tones and I have started to work on this pattern. The program is also only in its infancy.

Gareth: It looks like we have a lot to look forward to!

John: For someone who wanted to emphasize that I am breeding for form and garden habits I have certainly rambled on about colour patterns but that is how hybridizing gets to you!



To soak and grind or not, that is the question

Kathleen Sayce, February 29, 2012

Inspired by Diane Whitehead's multi-year study of seed storage methods to promote long term seed viability, I looked at another aspect: pre-germination treatment methods. In my first few years growing PCI from seed, germination was uneven and sporadic when seeds were directly planted in pots placed outside.

The problems were probably multiple: uneven soil moisture, especially in summer, and a host of faunal problems: Deer tug up and mouth iris seedlings, but do not replant them. Germinating seeds are eaten by Steller's Jays, Crows, and by several species of voles. Heavy wire mesh covers over seed pots deter some faunal problems.

Looking at ways to improve germination rates and uniformity of germination, I went to the SPCNI Almanac back issues. I was looking for methods that are easy to apply, useful to gardeners everywhere. Beyond promoting better seed survival in my own garden, I was also curious about how to handle seeds for two reasons, both to do with promoting PCI.

- One, are there methods that promote even and rapid germination that can be used by commercial growers?
- Two, when dealing with old seed, particularly seed more than five years old, are there methods that promote germination?

The methods that promote PCI seed germination, from a series of Almanac articles, can be summarized as follows:

1. Planting outside and letting normal winters proceed with rain and cold is the simplest method for most home gardeners along the West Coast in zones 6 to 10.

2. Soaking helps, e.g. thirty days in a mesh bag in the water tank of a toilet.
3. Stratifying seeds at 40 F.
4. Holding planted seeds at 50 F.

Reading past almanacs, extensive seed germination tests were conducted in the 1990s by Lewis Lawyer, Gene Loop and others. Lawyer and Loop summarized their findings by species, noting that for most PCI species, germination is optimal at temperatures around 50 F. Two species appear to prefer slightly higher temperatures, *I. munzii* and *I. hartwegii australis*; their optimal germination temperatures are around 60 F. These two species have more southerly distributions in warmer climates. No PCI has an optimal germination temperature above 65 F. This means that typical greenhouse temperatures are often too warm for germinating PCI seeds.

Another interesting note was from a European member, whose seeds arrived from the SPCNI Seed Exchange in a badly damaged envelope. The seeds were squashed, with seed coats rubbed open and the seeds themselves somewhat crushed. Despite this, he planted them anyway, and was pleasantly surprised by 'fairly prompt germination' of most of the seed.

Finally, I postulated that seeds from hybrids and species grown in gardens might be likely to germinate more quickly and evenly than would wild collected seeds. Even one generation removed from the wild, garden-grown bulbs and other plants show an increased tendency to germinate evenly and quickly. Uneven germination over several years is an obvious advantage to wild seeds. In a garden, plants typically shift to more even and rapid germination.

Ian Young, in his bulb blog for the Scottish Rock Garden Club (<http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/index.php?log=bulb>), has commented on this regularly, as have others.

Considering the above as background, I decided to look at the following aspects:

1. Change of weight in seeds when soaked before planting, held at 50 F.
2. Grinding off seed coats by using a hand cranked food mill, then soaking.
3. Germinating in three locations: a 50 F chamber, outside, and in a cold frame.

This article covers the first two aspects. The third is still underway, as of spring 2012 and will be reported later.

Methods

Ten seed lots from the 2011 SPCNI Seed Exchange were soaked and weighed in the first group. These lots were soaked for seventeen days and weighed every few days after the first week. For the second group of eight seed lots, also from the Seed Exchange, changes in seed weights were measured over thirty days. Finally, seed coats were ground down on three lots of seed, of group three, deliberately selecting older seed lots, 2009, 2007 and 2005. The third group was *I. douglasiana* seeds, all garden collected, from different years and different locations. A hand cranked food mill was used to grind down and partially remove the seed coats, with 10 to 25 grinds of each seed lot. A list of PCIs used in each test is in Table One, with the seed treatments.

Prior to weighing, seed lots were cleaned and non-viable seeds taken out, along with dust, pod fragments and other materials. No seed lots were pre-stratified at 40 F, which is another recommended method for promoting even and rapid germination.

Seeds were weighed on an electronic scale at the Washington State University–Long Beach Research Station, Long Beach, WA. Weights were determined to 0.0000 gram. The scale was recalibrated between each lot.

Soaked seeds were held in small plastic Whirl-Pak® bags, which have wire closures. To weigh, each lot was

weighed dry, then during the soaking period, seeds in each lot were rinsed out of the bag into a sieve, dried on clean paper towels, and weighed damp. After weighing, each seed lot was put back in its bag and fresh water added. All seed lots were returned to the 50 F chamber afterwards.

Soaking seed lots were held in a 50 F chamber, which is a modified refrigerator to which a new thermostat and monitoring thermometer were added. This method was recommended to me by Darm Crook, a lily hybridizer in Canada who has been very successful germinating lily species with precise temperature requirements in the cool hypogeal group. Darm's notes on germinating a variety of lily species in his 50 F chamber can be read online at http://www.pacificbulbsociety.org/pbswiki/index.php/Lily_Germination.



PCI 'Mendocino Blush', pre-soak on right, post-soak on left.

photo: Kathleen Sayce

Table One. PCI species and varieties used for seed tests, Winter 2012

PCI species or variety	Seed Year	WC or GC	Dry	Grind	Soak 50 F	Grp 1	Grp 2	Grp3
<i>I. douglasiana</i> CPHM	2009	GC	X	X	X		X	X
<i>I. douglasiana</i> Gary Knipe	2005	GC		X	X			X
<i>I. douglasiana</i> UC Berkeley	2007?	GC		X	X			X
<i>I. tenax</i> Hagg Lake, OR	2011	WC	X		X		X	
<i>I. tenax</i> Clackamas Co, OR	2011	WC	X		X		X	
<i>I. tenax</i> Lewis Co, WA	2007	WC	X		X		X	
PCI Brand Name	2011	GC			X	X		
PCI Canyon Snow	2008	GC	X		X		X	
PCI Dracularity	2011	GC			X	X		
PCI Earthquake	2011	GC			X	X		
PCI Escalona	2011	GC			X	X		
PCI Gold Dusted	2011	GC			X	X		
PCI Jean Erickson	2011	GC			X	X		
PCI Mendocino Blush	2011	GC	X		X	X	X	
PCI Santa Rosalita	2011	GC			X	X		
PCI Soquel Cove	2011	GC	X		X		X	
PCI Sunburn	2011	GC			X	X		
PCI Valley Banner	2011	GC	X		X		X	
PCI Violet Blush	2011	GC			X	X		

Seeds were observed as they soaked. Photographs were taken of dry seeds on a 5 x 5 mm grid. When the soaking period ended, seeds were photographed again on the same grid.

Findings

PCI seeds typically double their weight when soaked for two weeks or more; see graph one and table two. The mean change in weight from dry to wet seed over thirty days was 201%. This ranged from a low increase of 152% for *I. douglasiana* seed to a high of 256% for PCI 'Dracularity.' See the table for weight increases by seed lot. PCI 'Mendocino Blush' was in both groups, and continued to increase in weight to day 30, starting at 0.0140 g for dry seed, 0.0221 g at day 14, and 0.022 g at day 30, increasing in weigh by 232%. Seed lots in Group One were small, usually less than 10 seeds per lot, and for group two were over 30 seeds per lot, so the average weight per seed is more accurate for the second group.

In the first few days of soaking Group Two seeds, two seed lots gave off color to the water. The lots that stained water were PCI 'Valley Banner' and *Iris tenax* Lewis County. Both lots of seed turned water dark orange in the first one to three days. After this, their soaking water was clear.

Table Two. Changes in Seed Weights, Groups One and Two, weights are 0.0000 grams.

Group One: Seed Lots (14 days)	Start Weight	End Weight	Change in Weight
PCI Brand Name	0.0175	0.0395	226%
PCI Dracularity	0.0107	0.0273	256%
PCI Earthquake	0.0149	0.0324	217%
PCI Escalona	0.0136	0.0283	208%
PCI Gold Dusted	0.0204	0.0408	200%
PCI Jean Erickson	0.0115	0.0236	205%
PCI Mendocino Blush	0.0104	0.0221	213%
PCI Santa Rosalita	0.0153	0.0294	193%
PCI Sunburn	0.0191	0.0402	211%
PCI Violet Blush	0.0135	0.0235	174%
Mean Seed Weight, Group One	0.0147	0.0307	209%
Group Two: Seed Lots (30 days)			
PCI Canyon Snow	0.0180	0.0369	205.5%
PCI Mendocino Blush	0.0098	0.0228	232.3%
PCI Soquel Cove	0.0124	0.0289	232.2%
<i>I. douglasiana</i>	0.0179	0.0271	152.2%
PCI Valley Banner	0.0172	0.0333	196.0%
<i>I. tenax</i> Hagg Lake, Wash. Co, OR	0.0153	0.0350	228.6%
<i>I. tenax</i> Clackamas Co, Oregon	0.0136	0.0299	218.4%
<i>I. tenax</i> Lewis Co, WA	0.0133	0.0247	186.1%
Mean Seed Weight, Group Two	0.0150	0.0301	201.0%

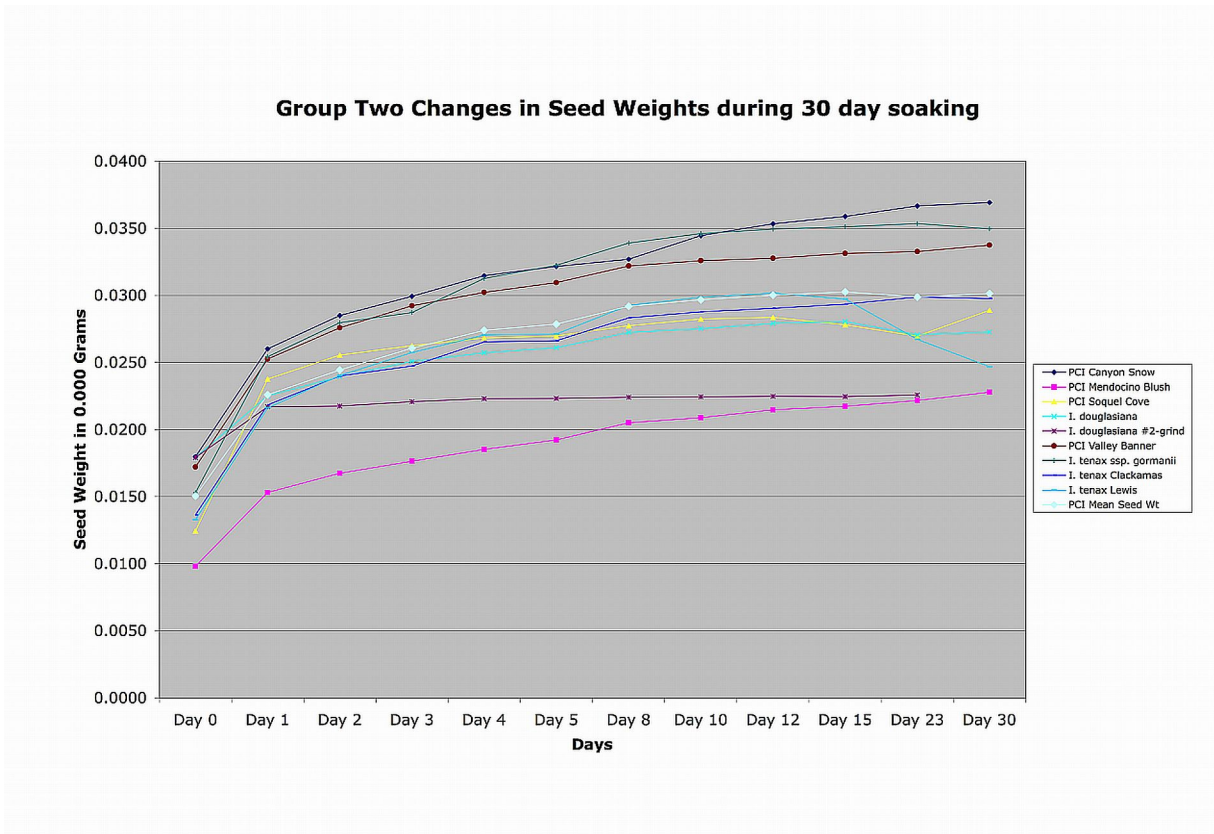
The seed coats began to soften and loosen from day fifteen forward. By day thirty, some seeds had loose and fragmenting seed coats; most seed coats were intact, though soft. The seed coat appears to slow water delivery to the seed. This may help the seed with a steady level of moisture uptake during intermittent rain and with irregular soil moisture. Seed coat fragments were lost as the seeds were rinsed and dried before weighing, slightly lowering the measured weight in some lots towards the end of the thirty-day period. Weight of seeds peaked around day thirty. However, most water was taken up in the first few days of soaking. Seeds with coats ground off took water up very rapidly, and reached maximum weight within one week.



I. douglasiana germination

photo: Kathleen Sayce

Graph I. Changes in Seed Weight by Day, Group Two.



While germination rates will be reported on later, one observation was a surprise: Several seed lots germinated during the soaking period. The first lot to germinate was *I. douglasiana* from the Columbia-Pacific Heritage Museum (CPHM), which had seed coats ground off; radicles (first roots) emerged by day 18 of the soaking period. Two more seed lots (with intact seed coats) had radicles emerging by day 25 to 28, which were seen on day 30. These were PCI ‘Soquel Cove’ and PCI ‘Mendocino Blush.’ All were garden collected seeds. In reading about seed germination tests, I did not find any comments on emergence of radicles during soaking, and would like to hear from SPCNI members about this. No species from wild collected seeds, or other hybrids, germinated during the soaking period.

Table Three. PCI Name, Age of Seed, and Percent Radicle Emergence at 30 Days

PCI Name	Seed Year	Treatment	Percent Emergence
<i>I. douglasiana</i> CPHM	2009	Grind + Soak	60%
PCI Mendocino Blush	2011	Soak	46%
PCI Soquel Cove	2011	Soak	14%

All seed lots that had early germination (e.g. during the soaking period) were of garden origin; the degree of distance from the wild is not known. The *I. douglasiana* selection is of garden origin and unknown parentage, being a large, vigorous *douglasiana*-type with pale lavender flowers of a species appearance. PCI 'Soquel Cove' is a Ghio hybrid that contains Mitchell-Craig genes (*I. douglasiana* x *I. innominata*) from the very earliest hybridizing in the US, along with later crossing to natural hybrids from the Santa Cruz Mountains in parent PCI 'Pasatiempo' (*I. douglasiana* x *I. fernaldii* x *I. macrosiphon*). PCI 'Mendocino Blush' is a Hudson garden selection, also of unknown parentage. Interestingly, this seed lot had the smallest seeds, both dry and wet. There is variability in seed size and weight among species, among hybrids and among seeds in individual pods.

Conclusion

The use of simple methods—grinding the seed coat partially off and soaking seeds in water—promoted seed awakening as measured by changes in seed weight and size, and by unexpectedly early emergence of the radicle in some seed lots.

For gardeners with well-established routines that work for their climates and gardens, these may seem like extreme measures. But for commercial growers, those germinating older PCI seeds, and those gardening in slightly less hospitable conditions around ravenous deer, birds and voles, the addition of seed coat grinding and soaking may improve the rate of germination and subsequent development of vigorous seedlings.



Retail nurseries and seed suppliers that offer plants or seeds

For seeds, go to www.cnplx.info, and search for 'Iris'—this will produce a list of suppliers of native iris seeds or plants. The list is long; most offer *Iris douglasiana*, and some PCI seedlings, and unnamed hybrids. With a little hunting, you will find most PCI species this way.

The balance of this list below is of nurseries or seed suppliers that offer seeds or plants. To be on this list, the business offers more than three species, or ten registered hybrids.

If you know businesses that should be added, please contact the SPCNI secretary.

California

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

Elkhorn Native Plant Nursery, 1957 Hwy 1 #B, Moss Landing, CA 95039, tel 831-763-1207; www.elkhornnursery.com; several PCI species.

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

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

Matilija Nursery, 8225 Waters Rd, Moorpark CA 93021, tel 805-523-8604; www.matilijanursery.com; several PCI species and hybrids, including new, not-yet-registered hybrids; direct sales at nursery; go to www.bonniesiris.com for online sales.

Theodore Payne Foundation, 10459 Tuxford St, Sun Valley, CA 91352, tel 818-768-1802; www.theodorepayne.org; several PCI species.

Tree of Life Nursery, 33201 Ortega Hwy, or PO Box 635, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675, tel 949-728-0685; www.californianativeplants.com; several PCI species.

Yerba Buena Nursery, 195000 Skyline Blvd [40 Langley Hill Rd], Woodside, CA 94062; tel 650-851-1668; www.yerbabuenanursery.com; more than 10 PCI species and hybrids.

Oregon

Wild Ginger Farm, 24000 S Schuebel School Rd, Beavercreek OR 97004; tel 503-632-2338;
www.wildgingerfarm.com; online catalog, several PCI species and hybrids.

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

Washington

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

Cascadia Iris Garden, PO Box 2520, Woodinville, WA 98072-2520, tel 425-770-5984;
www.cascadiairisgardens.com; online catalog, 13 PCIs, also Cal-Sibs.

Far Reaches Farm, 1818 Hastings Rd, Port Townsend, WA 98368, tel 360-385-5114; www.farreachesfarm.net;
online catalog, 5 PCI.

Leonine Iris, 7051 S 126th St, Seattle WA 98178-4337, tel 206-772-2780; www.leonineiris.com; online catalog, PCI
hybrids, and many other Iris groups.

Sundquist Nursery, PO Box 2451, or visit at 3809 NE Sawdust Hill Rd. Poulsbo, WA 98370 on Open Garden
Days; the annual list of open days is posted on their website; no mail order; www.sqnursery.com; several hybrids.

British Columbia

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

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

International

Aulden Farm, Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 0JT, England, tel 01568 720129;
www.auldenfarm.co.uk/pacificcoastiris.html; several PCI seedlings.

Broadleigh Bulbs, Barr House, Bishops Hull, Taunton, TA4 1AE; tel 01823 28623, fax 323646;
<http://www.broadleighbulbs.co.uk> ; source for Broadleigh PCIs, in a wide range of colors.

Collecting PCI Seeds

Emma Elliot, Seed Chair

Collecting Pacific Coast Iris seeds is easy to do but the timing can be tricky. Harvest seeds too early and they may fail to ripen properly. Harvest too late and you may find that a pod that seemed almost ripe and ready yesterday is an empty shell today.

The best time to collect PCI seeds is when the pod is fully mature. Pods that contain viable seeds are plump and full and turn from bright green to golden green as they ripen. When fully ripe, the seedpod begins to split open from the tip downward. Even if it has not started to split open, you can check the readiness of a pod by gently squeezing the tip end, as a ripe pod will begin to split just a little bit, telling you that the pod is ready for harvest. Once you get the hang of it, you can harvest pods just before they split open and finish ripening them in a dry location with good air circulation.

One of the easiest ways to ensure that you capture those precious seeds is to bag the pods before they are ripe. Organza party favor bags with a built in pull cord are an easy solution. Just drop them over the green pod and tie the pull cord with a shoelace knot for easy reopening. The sheer bags allow good air circulation and natural light to reach the pod and seeds can ripen at their own pace.

Organza bags are inexpensive and the pull cord makes them fast and easy to use. They come in several sizes and the 3 x 4" size works well for most PCI seedpods. Hybridizers can use the larger 4 x 6" or 5 x 8" bags on hand-pollinated flowers to protect crosses from insect pollination. They are available at party supply stores or mail order through an online search using the term 'organza bags'.

To harvest seedpods, snip the entire pod and drop it directly into a brown paper lunch bag or other breathable container, carefully labeling each collection as it is made then store the bags until you are ready to clean and package them. I like to use a white dinner plate when I carefully separate the seeds from the pods. To remove the chaff, take the plate outside and blow gently on the seeds – this is called winnowing and the small light bits will float away, leaving the heavier seeds behind. Scoop cleaned seeds into a labeled coin envelope, using the flap as a scooper, and store the seeds in a cool, dry location until sowing.

For seeds that will be donated to the seed exchange, be sure to label each seed envelope clearly with the species or variety, collection location if wild collected and your name. Including an estimate of the number of seeds in the envelope will earn you an extra thank you from seed exchange volunteers. Your donation is now ready to mail!



Seed pods - immature and just about right!



photos: Emma Elliot

Report from Northern California

Kathy Braaten

We in northern California are fortunate to be able to grow PCIs with relative ease. Recently I accepted a request to be the northern California representative for SPCNI and, although I am not a writer, I will do my best to compile information that comes in to me and give you some updates from my own garden. I live in Grass Valley CA, an historic gold rush town, at the base of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, at an elevation of 2500 feet. My property is 2/3 of an acre covered in a canopy of pine and black oak trees. There are many varieties of iris growing in my garden – I have many cultivars of bearded iris, Spuria iris, Siberian iris, Louisiana iris, Japanese iris and of course Pacific Coast Iris - approximately 25 to 30 named PCI cultivars. They seem to like an occasional layer of snow on them, which we get maybe once or twice a winter, and appear to be most at home with my moderately acidic soil. I do not hybridize, but leave that to the local bees. Last year I had a large number of seedpods set, which I attribute to the winter we had in 2011 – it seemed as though our winter started in late November and ended in May, with even a dusting of snow on Memorial Day in May. We have had relatively a dry winter this year until just recently, although the PCIs did get their annual snow in the middle of March. I will hope for great bloom and seeds again this year in my garden. A report will follow after this bloom season.

When asked to be the representative for northern California, I sent an e-mail out to all of the northern California members on the membership list. Some e-mails returned undeliverable. Please check and update your information if it has changed since you became a member. I would love to hear from all of you in the future. Please let me know how your PCIs are growing.

I did hear back from a few of you out there.

Lois Weeth from Monterey CA reports: My garden here has a native area, which includes several species and cultivars. They do well with little water. Canyon Snow is a prize, blooming over a long period. I have *I. douglasiana* from several locations: Bodega Bay, Bolinas, and Del Monte forest. From Mendocino County I have *I. macrosiphon*, and from San Mateo county, *I. longipetala*. The Iris family interests me greatly!

Kathy Crump of Stockton CA reports: I have only been growing PCN Iris for about 10 years. I became interested when I took on the leadership position of a new group, Friends of Five Mile Creek, doing cleanup, restoration and replanting. I bought my first Iris from Cal Flora in Fulton and Cornflower Nursery in Elk Grove and fell in love with these relatives of all the natives I saw while living in Oregon. I haven't been successful getting them to adapt to only receiving water when it rains. I hand water the first year with all new plants along the creek banks and then phase out irrigation the second year. I have excellent luck growing and germinating seed in my garden because I will water during droughts such as we are having this winter. However, while I have great seed germination and gorgeous healthy seedlings, none have ever bloomed after 3 years. I am hoping to see some blooms this year. My hope is to find a really strong PCN Iris that can make it through lean water years. I am not going very fast in this endeavor because I have such a huge amount of other plants to keep me busy.

Jean Cox of Vacaville, CA reports:

I'm sort of new to growing PCI's, but only because I've had a hard time finding plants in local nurseries. I've had one white one and one blue one for several years, and they've multiplied and spread in an area that gets water about once a week in my Vacaville garden. Last year I picked up two new ones at the local nursery, unnamed, but I was just glad to find them.

Please contact me for future reports:

e-mail katbrat@cebridge.net Phone: 530 477-2811





Previous two pages:
Some of the exciting results from John Taylor's breeding programme