



Pacific Iris

Almanac of the Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris



Some of Joe Ghio's 2018 seedlings, as shared on Bay View Gardens' Facebook page

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.

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Use Paypal to join SPCNI online at <http://pacificcoastiris.org/JoinOnline.htm> (SEE NOTE BELOW)

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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>.

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Life, dual	\$1500.00	NA
E-membership	\$15.00	everywhere

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PACIFIC IRIS DEADLINES: March 15 and September 15.

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NOTICE RE PAYPAL

When you order seeds or extend memberships via PayPal, please send a message separately to the appropriate email address (seedex@pacificcoastiris.org or orders@pacificcoastiris.org). More often than we like, PayPal does not send a confirmation message to these addresses.

When you send a separate email, include the date that you placed an order, or the date when you updated your membership. Then the Secretary or Seed Chair can quickly find the missing transaction.

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In this issue:

Editor's notes

Gareth Winter 3

Growing Pacific Coast Irises commercially

Bob Sussman 4-7

Hunting a photograph of

'Banbury Gem' 7

An on-line checklist for Pacific Coast Irises

Kenneth Walker 8-10

A trial with *Iris munzii*

Kenneth Walker 10

Hybridizing for fun

Steve Taniguchi 11-13

New Members 13

Two pleas for seed to please

Louise Guerin

Debby Cole 14

A living archive of Pacific Coast Irises

Bob Seaman 15-16

Carl Purdy—and his 'purdy' little iris

Gareth Winter 17-19

Important notices 20

John Taylor seedlings by colour

20-22

Front cover—A John Taylor seedling

Inside front cover—

Joe Ghio 2018 seedlings

**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

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
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 win-
ners, 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.

Editor's notes

Greetings from the bottom of the world where
the leaves are starting to turn colour and the
PCI's are putting out lovely white roots,
meaning they are ready for transplanting.

In this issue, our president Bob Sussman tells
us about his transplanting methods, and the
key differences between pottering around in a
garden, and potting plants for sale in a
commercial nursery.

Kenneth Walker reports on two very
important projects— the creation of an online
cultivar database, a new feature of the SPCNI
website. Make sure you have a look at it.
He also reports on his trials with double
potting that troublesome species, *Iris munzii*.

Steve Taniguchi has written about his fun
crosses among PCIs, and tries to enthuse
everyone to have a try.

Louise Guerin and Debby Cole have both
written, stressing the importance of more
donors for the Seed Exchange, a vital way for us
to spread the word about PCIs. Debby asks
those who live near wild populations to harvest
a little seed so we can all share in growing these
species.

As a plant lover by inclination, and an archivist
by profession, I was very interested in Bob
Seaman's piece about the creation of a living
archive of PCIs. He explains that the archive is
open in May, so if you live in Washington state,
you should get there.

We round off with a piece about the man that
Iris purdyi is named after, some important
announcements and then a selection of
seedlings from Australian breeder John Taylor.
What a wonderful range he has produced!

Gareth

Growing Pacific Coast Irises commercially

Words and images—Bob Sussman

Growing Pacific Coast Iris commercially is a lot more complicated than growing them in your garden, whether you grow your own plants from seed or plant out potted cultivars. In your garden if a few come up and flower out of the 100 seeds you've sown, it's great experience. Some of the seedlings from modern hybrids produce really new and interesting flowers and that's especially rewarding for home gardeners.

For us it's a bit different. We are a native plant nursery, located in southern California, and Pacific Coast Irises are part of the range of the plants we grow. They are easily among the most beautiful of California's native plants - if not the most beautiful. They are also native to Oregon and Washington. Once planted in a correct location, at the right time of year in a garden they will predictably bloom for years and years with little to no care so there's a good market for them.

But they are very difficult and time consuming to produce. Growing them commercially is a long process and can be (by that I mean it is!) a challenge.

There are several steps involved. A new creation for commercial purposes is easily the most time consuming and can take years before they can be made available for sale.

Here is how it all works for us.

1st spring

In spring we start crossing irises that we think will produce offspring that are both beautiful and good growers, remembering that good parents usually produce good children. This is not 100% correct, but it is a good place to start. When we make a cross we ensure that it is well labelled so we know how different varieties work - whether they are good parents or not.

Once the seedpod is ripe and begins to split we cut it from the stem and toss it in a brown paper bag to dry further, knowing that the splitting seed capsule will disburse the seeds into the bag. We also make sure the bag is labeled with parentage.



Seed pods filled with future irises.



Freshly harvested seed, complete with label

1st fall

The seeds remain in a paper bag or envelope and are stored in a dry place over summer until early fall when they are sown in containers or seed flats.

They generally begin to germinate in a month or two and in about four months they are ready to be transplanted to small containers. Again, we make sure we label everything!



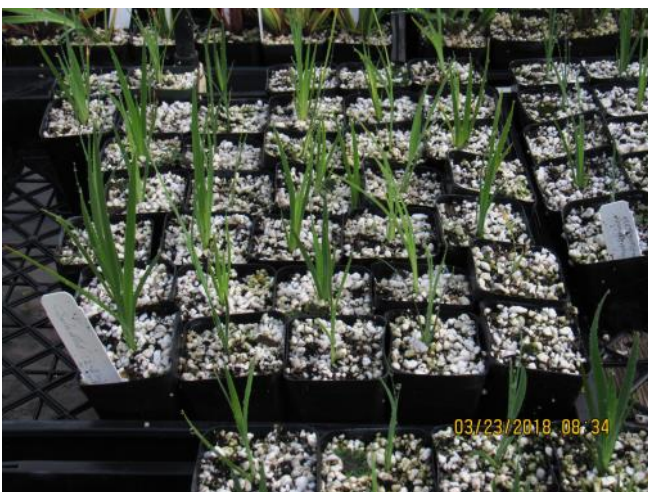
Freshly sown seeds



Germination in containers with labels

End of 1st fall/early winter

Once they've germinated and are an inch or two tall they are ready for small containers. They all have to be labeled individually, so we can track them when they start to flower. This is where the baby irises will live until next fall.



Freshly pricked out seedlings

2nd fall

Note we've held our new irises from first winter through spring and summer and now we're ready to plant to fairly large pots, either 3 or 5 gallon containers.



PCs in their final containers

2nd spring

It is during the second spring, in these larger pots that we planted in fall, that we get our first idea about what we have. Some of our new creations are very spectacular but a lot of them are disappointing. Some that are closer to the spectacular side of things look similar to one another and you have to decide which is the better one to go into production. It pays to keep growing the others, as they can surprise you with good characteristics that you did not notice at first, such as multiple blooms in a flower capsule or heavy branching. Something far worse can happen—the one we picked for production really does not grow well and kicks the bucket while the other less spectacular seedling grows beautifully.

Both of the irises featured overleaf are from the same cross. I particularly liked the red one but in accordance with Murphy's Law - it didn't like me. The other one turned out to be more robust.



The more attractive but less vigorous sibling



Divisions growing on



Less favoured but more resilient

3rd fall

Now that we have figured out which seedlings we want to keep and put into production, it is time to divide our favorites. We divide all of our Pacific Coast Irises from early October through the end of November. If you try this either earlier or much later they will kick the bucket. They are planted out in the same small liner containers that we plant the seedlings.

We hold them until they root out by early winter, and then plant about 60% into 1-gallon containers for sale in early spring as well as planting a large number into bigger containers for division next fall. About 30% are held in the rose pot containers for potting up in the following early fall to 1-gallon containers for sale in late fall/early winter.

For new introductions we have to go through the steps of planting to large containers and dividing in fall a few times until we have enough stock to sell.

All in all, to go from “cross” to having enough inventory to sell takes at least four years. We always have to keep the process of crossing, planting, and dividing going on so we are able to bring out new irises and create enough inventory to sell. It is a really long production assembly line where certain things can only be done at set times of the year. There are all kinds of trouble you can get into with diseases and growing medium issues, which generally happens to us in summer.

Nevertheless here are a few of the irises we have been working on for several years. Fortunately, we finally have enough to offer next late fall through early spring in both 1 and 5-gallon containers. And even better there are lots more new varieties the following year.

To summarize, growing and hybridizing Pacific Coast Irises on a commercial level is a long-term proposition. All things considered sometimes I wish I had just stayed as a hobbyist – it was much more fun and a lot less stress - but after several years now we are coming to the fun part and there’s no turning back!



Hunting a photograph of 'Banbury Gem'

Do you grow what you believe to be 'Banbury Gem' or do you have a color photo of this flower? Does it fit the description "S. medium ruby; F. ruby red".?

We have a photo in our on-line database that is labeled 'Banbury Gem', although the standards and falls seem to be the same shade of "ruby".

We are hoping to get a consensus of what 'Banbury Gem' really looks like. If you can share a photo with us along with any information, if you have it, on where the plant came from, please send it to :
Kenneth Walker <kenww001@astound.net>.

An online checklist for Pacific Coast Irises

Kenneth Walker

The SPCNI web site now has a Cultivar Database, also known as an Online Checklist. It is devoted to named Pacific Coast Irises, both those registered with the AIS and those that remain unregistered. While similar to material in the AIS Iris Encyclopedia, the database is focused on a single type of iris. In addition, disparate information in the description of each iris is separated and presented in an easy to read format.

The Cultivar Database is a merger of two projects. The older of the two is **CHECK LIST OF PACIFIC COAST NATIVE IRIS CULTIVARS AND SPECIES**, a paper document originally edited by Ed Pasahow and first published by the Society in 1974. The second project started 30 years later when the Society decided to create a collection of digital images of Pacific Coast Irises. Richard Richards, the president at the time, recruited Ken Walker to develop this collection.

Within a couple of years Ken had also taken over the Checklist. After maintaining the Checklist and publishing it for several years, Ken decided to use photos from the growing collection to transform the old Checklist into an Illustrated Checklist. That work was eventually completed, although the Illustrated Checklist was never distributed as such.

The Checklist document contains a number of sections that had not been updated for many years and Ken hoped to remedy that before distributing the new version.

Unfortunately the updates were not all easy.

One section listed cultivars that were most often used in breeding along with how often they were used by the originator of the cultivar and how often they were used by other hybridizers. The checklist was now large enough that analyzing all the pedigrees by hand was not something that appealed to a software engineer like Ken.

Most of the pedigrees are nicely structured and should be amenable to analysis by a computer program; when a pedigree contains general English text, putting quotes around the text would allow the program to treat this text as something it does not need to understand.

Ken found the project to automate the analysis of pedigrees challenging enough to be fun – much more fun than manually analyzing them.

Well over half the pedigrees could be analyzed as-is and most of the rest just needed some judicious quotes. With the pedigrees cleaned up, Ken experimented with producing various flavors of cultivar descendant analysis – a distraction from creating the simpler table in the Checklist.

Continuing the trend of distraction, Ken realized that he should be able to use pedigree analysis to produce a nice web-based display of each pedigree (the more complex pedigrees are almost unreadable in simple text form). The result of this sub-project is now seen in the online Cultivar Database.





By this time, some years had passed since the Illustrated Checklist project had been started; Bob Seaman was now the SPCNI web master and making large improvements to the web site. The decision was made to put the Checklist online.

Bob favored converting the Checklist into a true database, so Ken undertook that project. For various reasons, it was some years before this was completed and incorporated in to the SPCNI web site.

The database is accessed via the Resources tab of the web site www.pacificcoastirises.org. Currently there are two ways to find an iris: by the name's initial letter or by a searching for names containing particular text. The initial page shows irises starting with the letter 'A'.

SPCNI Cultivar Database

search names [A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [X](#) [Y](#) [Z](#)

	A'Sante, D. Meek, R. 1985
	Adept, Joseph Ghio, R. 1997
	Admiral's Pride, Vernon Wood, R. 2003
	


Selecting the name or photo takes you to the page for the particular cultivar. For example, Adept:

SPCNI Cultivar Database

search names [A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [X](#) [Y](#) [Z](#)

[PREVIOUS](#) [NEXT](#)

Adept, Joseph Ghio, registered 1997



Photographed by Ken Walker

S. mahogany rose; F. apricot rose, deep maroon signal.
 Height: 14" (36 cm.)
 Bloom season: early mid
 Seedling number: PD-245N2
 Introduced: Bay View Gardens, 1997

Pedigree

☐ Adept
 ♀ Local Girl
 ♂ PG-172A: sib to Charter Member

The PREVIOUS button takes you to 'A'Sante' and the NEXT button takes you to 'Admiral's Pride'. You can click on any cultivar in the pedigree to see its entry.

We have lots of ideas for improving the Cultivar Database. More flexible searching is near the top of the list.

Others include:

- A link to the cultivar's entry in the AIS Encyclopedia (it will sometimes have other photos)
- More hybridizer information so we can produce hybridizer pages from the Database
- Better organization of awards (they appear after the "Introduced" line, if there are any)
- Ancestor/descendant relationships showing just named cultivars by generation, perhaps after the Pedigree.

I am sure we'll think of other improvements more quickly than we have time implement them.



'Snake Charmer' - one of Heidi Blyth's Australian-raised Pacific Coast Irises.

A trial with *I. munzii*

Words and image -

Kenneth Walker

Iris munzii is a tall, elegant species of Pacific Coast Iris that some of us lust after. However, it is endemic to the Sierra foothills of Tulare County, California and is not often grown successfully outside its native habitat. Its seeds are rarely available, but I have obtained them a few times, most recently Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden seeds through the SPCNI seed exchange.

Iris munzii seedlings seem fairly resilient when young but, in the past, mine have always died before reaching blooming size despite several different treatments. This time around I decided to try a double potting technique. I now have six seedlings. One bloomed last year and another bloomed this spring. If they survive one more summer, I'll declare victory and write an article next spring describing the technique in detail.



Iris munzii in Kenneth Walker's garden

Hybridizing for Fun

Words and images: Steve Taniguchi

If you like surprises, you should try hybridizing your Pacific Coast Iris. You don't need to be fancy, just pick two varieties you like and cross them.

Once in a while, I make a "what if?" cross between two named varieties just to see what happens. Most often I end up with something plain and ordinary, but sometimes something different appears.

You do not need much space. I usually have maybe a dozen seedlings (and after upsizing containers) in one-gallon plastic pots. They usually bloom in three or four years after germinating. When I first started, seedlings would bloom their second year. Now that I've been doing this a while, it takes three or four years – I'm not sure why.

I've listed a couple of surprises I've had below, and end with a recent cross I made that started blooming this year. I've included photos,

(Note, cross numbers are two-digit year, dash, two-digit number of the cross for that year, then some letters for a specific seedling)

04-07BA is a cross between 'Mantra' and 'Wine and Cheese'. The surprise is that this seedling has branches. The photo shows one stalk with two branches, two blooms and three other spent blooms. This seedling died under my tender loving care.



05-02H

05-02H is a cross between 'Letter Perfect' and 'Gordola'. I was trying to get a 'Letter Perfect' pattern on a yellow ground. The result was not what I expected, it has a light yellow background with magenta veins and light purple styles.



04-07BA



07-03EEI

07-03EE1 (photograph on previous page) is a cross between 'Multiplicity' and 'Marriage Proposal'. All of the other seedlings of this cross were not very attractive, (and you wouldn't want those to have a second set of bloom stalks!) I kept this one because it has a pleasing blend of colors (looks best when the weather is cooler, the colors are darker). It has never produced a second set of bloom stalks.



08-09A

08-09A is a cross between 'Father Figure' and 'Public Eye'. 'Father Figure' is a yellow veined with reddish-brown, 'Public Eye' is a white veined with violet, with violet style arms. Since both parents have veins, I knew the seedlings would be veined. 08-09A is the only seedling of that cross to bloom and of course, it was solid brick-red! This seedling died during our recent drought.



13-01



12-02A



12-02B

12-02 (above) is a cross between 'Public Eye' and 'Seeing Eye'. I've included photos of 12-02A and 12-02B to show the range of colors/patterns (some still haven't bloomed yet).

13-01 (left) is a cross between 'Power Center' and 'Public Eye'. This is another seedling that has darker colors when the weather is cooler.



14-01B



14-01D



14-01E

This year, seedlings of one of the crosses I made in 2014 started blooming.

14-01 is a cross between 'This Is It' and 'Bay Street.' I've included photos of the three seedlings that have bloomed so far so that you can see the variation in patterns. I like 14-01D and hope it survives.

Those of you who have Pacific Coast Iris and some free time should try hybridizing some of your iris. It is fun and you often get surprises. A word of warning— if you're not careful, you'll find yourself addicted to it and will spend hours looking in the new SPCNI Cultivar Database researching pedigrees before choosing pod and pollen parents.

New members

We welcome the following new members and look forward to hearing about their experiences growing Pacific Coast Iris.

Ranulf Bennett, Brea, CA

Michael Ennis, Seattle, WA

Russell Gillespie, Los Angeles, CA

Marilyn Lang, Saratoga, CA

Abbey Levantini, San Francisco, CA

Jancy Lovell, Fresno, CA

Gwen McDevitt, Beaconsfield, TAS, AU

Carol Moll, Orinda, CA

Sue Ann Schiff, San Francisco CA

Nancy Thrun, Camas, WA

Paul Young, Raymond, WA

Two pleas for seeds to please ...

Louise Guerin

Greetings from the Pacific SW. The 2017 Seed Exchange closed on February 2 and all orders were shipped by March. We were also able to sell seeds from our larger lots to the Theodore Payne Foundation for them to begin building their inventory for sales and naturalizing around the Foundation grounds.

Order totals were down from the previous three years and were pretty even between in-country and out-of-country sales. The size of the orders was also smaller than in previous years. I'm sure this is due to the packaging policy (no more than 20 seed packets per parcel) and the pricing (\$3.00/packet). By limiting the number of seed envelopes per packet, I've been able to send the material in envelopes instead of parcels - which has saved on postage and time filling out customs forms. Customers are enthusiastic and have been very patient with our late starts and newer policies.

We were lucky enough to have a new donation from Doug Fraser in 2017. He donated two species we've not offered during my tenure as Seed Chairman. They sold out by the end of the season. Steve Taniguchi also supplied some great seed material this year. I also should mention that Kenneth Walker donated specific crosses in 2016 - most of which have now sold out. Debby Cole, Bob Sussman, Kathleen Sayce and Garry Knipe (our regulars) also sent in some new items for the Exchange (as well as a few items from other members).

While we have a good selection of seeds, we need to have more members donating to the Exchange to enhance our list. Those donations will ensure that PCI Seed Exchange will continue to offer a broad variety of seeds, and that we have newer material to offer (some of our older seeds will be removed from the Exchange in 2018 - we only offer them for 10 years and then retire them).

So - if you have a mind to collect some seed and offer it to the Exchange, please feel welcome to do so. Or if you have a stash that you're saving for the perfect time, that time is now. Please send them to Louise Guerin, SPCNI Seed Chair, 2200 E Orange Grove Blvd, Pasadena, CA 91104. Thank you for your efforts to keep the Seed Exchange well-stocked.

Debby Cole

I live on the West Coast of the United States. Pacific Coast Iris grow here fairly happily, and occur naturally within 85 miles of here.

I love to see what they look like in the wild, and have done so for many species.

For the others? I talk to friends, look at websites, check maps, lay plans.....and order seeds. If I can't get there to see them in person, I can at least grow them from seed, thanks to the SPCNI and SIGNA seed exchanges and the members who send in seed for the rest of us to grow.

Unfortunately, very few members have collected seed of very few species recently. Somehow we have to make the effort! After all, what are we here for, if not to see and share with others the Pacific Coast irises? And seeds are the way that the most people can grow and see these lovely things.

Please, fellow plant lovers, can you schedule a day or two in the spring to hunt the blooms, and a day in the summer to return and collect seed? Gestation is about nine weeks or a little less. Shelled seeds need only be dried in open air for a week or two, then sent to our Seed Exchange Chair Louise Guerin—as per the previous column.

I wish I could get seed of *I. hartwegii*, *fernaldii*, *macrosiphon*, *chrysophilla*, *munzii*, *tenuissima*, *purdyi*, and *bracteata*.

I. douglasiana, *innominata* and *tenax* don't seem to be a problem. Do you live in the area of one of these 'desirables'? Two very handy references for those hunting the Pacific species are Victor Cohen's 'A Guide to the Pacific Coast Irises' for identification and Lee Lenz's 'Hybridization and Speciation in the Pacific Coast Irises' for locations; both of these are available through SPCNI (see page 3). If you have internet access, two other valuable sources are the California herbaria websites, <http://ucjeps.berkeley.edu/consortia> and <http://www.calflora.org>. You can search both of them by either the species you want or the county you'll be in.

Thanks in advance for making the effort to improve the enjoyment of Pacific Coast Irises for all of us.

A living archive of PCI

Words and images—Bob Seaman

My long-term goal for the past decade has been to create a living archive of Pacific Coast Irises. Inspired by Carla Lankow's passion for historic bearded irises, I decided to start doing the same for Pacificas.



Front upper west border

Here's my story:

My first interest in iris started decades ago in my childhood with the typical "Grandma's flags" and the Tall Bearded iris catalogs my dad received every year from Schreiners. As time passed I became aware of Siberian and Japanese Iris, until one fateful Saturday when I happened upon an Iris Show that included a few of the Pacific Coast Irises. Little did I know that a seed was planted that day that would soon grow into the focus of my journey with iris.

I love all types of iris.

When I moved into my current home in 2000 the majority of the iris I grew were bearded varieties. I started with a 6,000 square foot city lot that was essentially a blank palette and the freedom to set about creating my own iris paradise. As some of the trees I planted then started maturing, I was forced to grow fewer of the sun-loving iris and start growing more of the shade tolerant Pacific Coast and species iris.

At first, growing Pacificas was a challenge. I felt fortunate when I had a 50% survival rate of divisions received locally and imported from commercial growers in Oregon and California. My horticulture background, some online research and subsequent common-sense thinking led me to some surprising concepts about growing Pacificas that have led to my current 95% survival rate of local divisions and 85% survival rate of imports!



Seedling 'Peachberry Sorbet'

When available new hybrids seemed to be too challenging to transition to the Seattle area, I began considering hybridizing, but hesitated due to space concerns. All hybridizers I knew had acres to work with, so my city lot seemed woefully inadequate. Then Jean Witt provided me with inspiration when she "retired" to a Senior Community but kept up with her hybridizing in the raised beds they provided. I realized then that I could do the same in the limited space I have. Growing Pacificas from seed has been a rather amazing journey of its own while being quite educational and enjoyable. It's been fascinating to see the extent of differences in seedling foliage and bloom when compared to the parents! I've also kept a few bee cross pods to germinate, since Mother Nature has a multitude of pollen options in the immediate vicinity. I have two-year plants from a bee-cross on 'Tiki'. The foliage ranges from thin, like 'Tiki', to quite stout, like *I. douglasiana*. I'm looking forward to seeing what the bloom is like next month! But I digress....

The Living Archive

When I first joined the local Iris Society, I often heard comments of “Why are you growing *that* iris?”. “*That* iris” was usually a bearded iris that I’d carried with me from home to home since my mid-twenties. It had sentimental value, plus I felt that it was quite lovely, in spite of “newer or better” varieties on the market! And then about ten years ago I was lamenting about losing ‘Peeps’, a Pacifica I was rather intrigued with .



The intriguing ‘Peeps’

The response was essentially “good riddance”. I was a bit stunned but look back at that moment as the time I decided that I wanted to start collecting Pacificas to preserve their history, *without judgment*. I’ve had limited regrets since then, mostly due to my body reminding me that I can’t do as much as I used to. My biggest regret is that I wasn’t able to start collecting earlier, since there are so many beautiful hybrids from previous decades that seem to have been lost.



Seedling ‘Dawning Sunset’

Garden tours

Garden tours of Leonine Iris were available by appointment for several years. Interference of job requirements and folks not honoring the appointments led to the decision to simply be open for garden tours each Saturday in May a few years ago. We now have over 340 named hybrids growing along with a few hundred seedlings.



Front border under *Styrax japonica*

Redundancy is part of my technical background thinking, so as preservation against the possibility of loss, my goal is to have three differently sited clumps of every Pacifica hybrid we’re growing (a lesson learned from losing ‘Peeps’); we are well on the way to achieving this goal!

This also allows folks to see how the plant may grow in a variety of conditions since some are in full sun or part shade, growing on level ground or banks, or growing with root competition of other plants or just other Pacificas.

The response to the Open Garden has increased every year; we’re expecting over two hundred visitors this year. With over 2000 iris in the yard (we still grow some 600 non-Pacificas) there’s bound to be something in bloom no matter when folks visit!

If you happen to be in the area on a Saturday in May, please consider dropping by. The sight of several hundred Pacificas in bloom isn’t one to be missed!

Carl Purdy — and his “purdy” little iris

Words—Gareth Winter

Among the wild species of Pacific Coast Iris is Purdy's iris, also known as the Redwood iris, *Iris purdyi*.

It grows wild in the coastal forests between Sonoma and Trinity counties, growing in dense leaf litter on the forest floor, usually in semi-shade and in association with Douglas fir, tan oak, madrone, bay and other mixed evergreen trees. It generally grows as a single specimen, or perhaps in loose clumps, up to 3,000 ft .



Iris purdyi—photo Carlton Lee

In its pure form it has large somewhat flat flowers, somewhat reminiscent of a star fish, generally coloured white, cream or light yellow, often with purple or reddish-brown veins on the falls. Where it meets others species it readily hybridises, and flowers tend to have a wash in the purple-lavender range. On the coast it tends to form hybrids with *I. douglasiana*, while inland it crosses with *I. macrosiphon*. This ease of hybridisation has put this charming species at risk. Although once common, the increased logging in the area, and the creation of new highways, has changed the environment and meant that *I. douglasiana* and *I. macrosiphon* have become more common. This has meant higher rates of hybrids and a diminution in pure stands.

Ironically, a hybrid of Purdy's iris was the first PCI to win a Royal Horticultural Society Award of Merit. The great English irisarian William Dykes, of Dykes Medal fame, crossed it with *I. tenax*, and the resulting plant called "Iota" won the award in 1914. It appears to be no longer in cultivation.

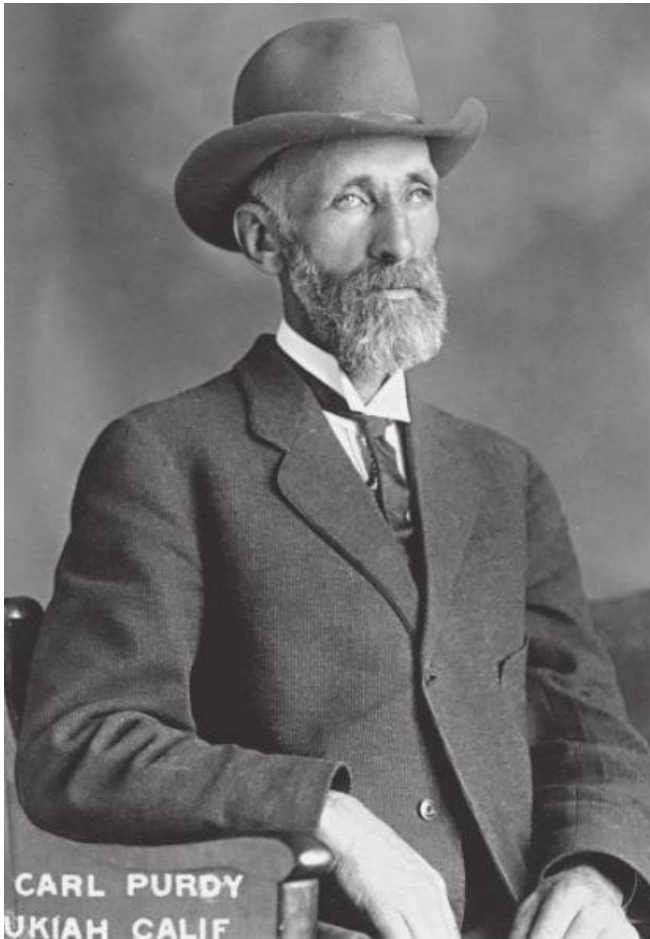
For those who are botanically minded, Purdy's iris is readily identified as it is the only PCI species with a truncate, non-triangular stigma, and possesses a long, funnel shaped floral tube. The spathes are very broad and enclose the ovary and most of the floral tube.



Clump of *Iris purdyi*—photo Emily Nelson

The species was named by Alice Eastwood (1859-1953), the prominent northern California botanist and horticulturist who named a number of native plants in honour of the plant collector and prominent nurseryman Carl Purdy, including *Brodiaea purdyi*, *Fritillaria purdyi* and *Iris purdyi*.

Carl Purdy had a long and eventful life, which literally started in a log house in Dansville, Michigan in 1861. When he was four his family made the long trek across the plains to Virginia City, Nevada, then on further to Ukiah, Mendocino County, CA in 1870. The Purdy family had a military background, and Carl was accepted to West Point but an accident left his eyesight damaged. He had to leave his military aspirations behind.



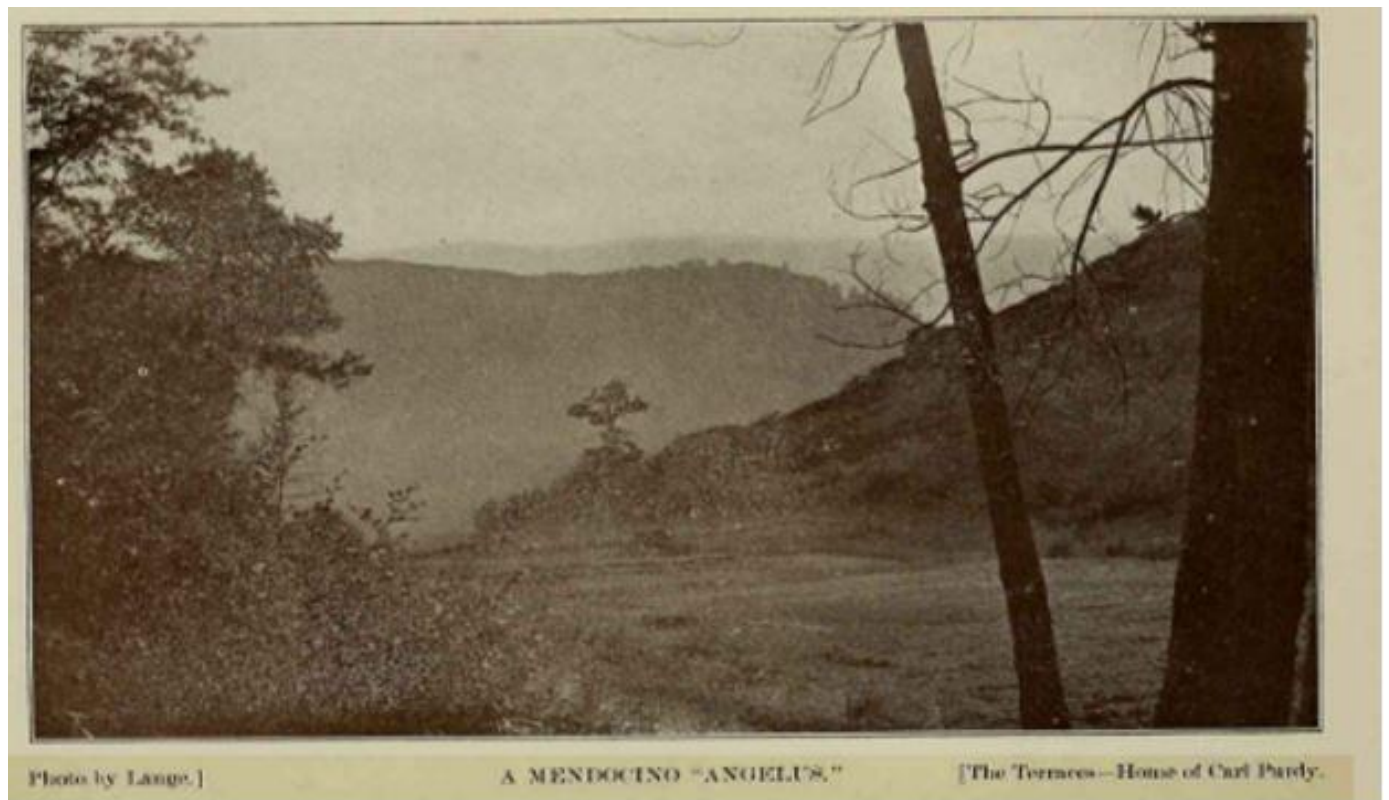
Carl Purdy

His parents bought an established sheep ranch which also grew 15 acres of hops. He worked on the farm, and started a small garden at his home. He later followed various occupations – insurance agent, jeweller and farmer- but it was horticulture that was to absorb the rest of his life.

In about 1878, following an attack of tuberculosis, he was hiking through the woods with his sister when they happened on a patch of small flowers, shaped like tiny yellow hanging lanterns. Intrigued by these little treasures, he dug up some of the plants, discovering that they were bulbs. In fact, he had stumbled on a species of fairy lanterns, *Calochortus*, and this encounter was to change the course of his life.

He sent the bulbs to Woolson and Co, nurserymen of New Jersey who told him they would pay \$1.50 for every 100 bulbs he could deliver. Carl Purdy was in business as a plant collector.

It was not a glamorous life, as he later recalled. He explained that he had travelled through the wilderness of California, seeking out bulbous plants in particular, stressing that it was arduous work with “a good stratum of hard work and monotony.” Perhaps it was because of this he spent a period as a botany teacher.



To modern ears, his work collecting specimens sounds devastating, and many would argue that he hastened the depletion of California's native flora, especially the bulbous component. He disagreed, answering that he had learnt some techniques from the Native Americans that not only preserved but actually enhanced the plants' survival. He said the Native Americans had taught him that in harvesting bulbs for food they always separated out the smaller bulbs and replanted them.

He argued that when he arrived there were wild flowers everywhere, but as civilisation arrived, so the flowers disappeared. He maintained it was livestock grazing, the arrival of invasive and vigorous grasses, and the lack of brush fires that had combined to cause the loss of the once abundant wild flowers. He said sometimes the disturbances helped native plants though. He said he had once found 30,000 *Camassias* growing in the bed of a drained lake, while in another site, 10,000 *Lilium humboldtii* suddenly grew where the forest had been cleared.



Cover of Carl Purdy nursery catalogue 1940

At first he was doing the hard collecting work himself, but as he became established, and as he worked out the most efficient ways to gather the bulbs, he started employing local collectors.

Carl Purdy established a world-renowned nursery at The Terraces, his home in Ukiah, and at his gardens in Mill Creek Valley, said to have the most luxuriant growth of any canyon in the Coast range. His holdings totalled 180 acres.

In his gardens he started cultivating the native bulbs he was collecting, bulking them up in cultivation before selling them on. He was especially well known for his collection of American members of the *Lilium* genus, as well as Mariposa lilies, *Calochortus*, and dog tooth violets, *Erythronium*. He also had extensive beds of daffodils and tulips.

He wrote extensively about the use of Californian natives in the garden, and was also a trader in Native American basketware, once again writing on that topic. He built landscape displays for the 1915 World's Fair in San Francisco, and laid out gardens for a number of large estates and hotels. A fluent Spanish speaker, he could also converse in several Native American languages.

In 1939 Carl Purdy was awarded the Herbert Medal by the International Bulb Society, the highest honour the Society can award for meritorious achievement in advancing the knowledge of bulbous plants.

Carl Purdy died on August 8, 1945 at 84 years. His children, Mary Purdy Robinson, Mabel Purdy Mahurin, and Elmer C. Purdy, carried on the business with his son as manager starting in 1925. The business was called Carl Purdy Gardens after his death.



Important announcements

Situations vacant

A very desirous vacancy has arisen for the SPCNI 2nd VP.

You will be the president-in-waiting, one step down from the VP. Your task is to make yourself familiar with the society and how it operates, just in case you need to step in.

It is a rewarding and interesting job.

Interested volunteers should apply to Kathleen Sayce:
e-mail: ksayce@willapabay.org

Seeds needed

Seeds wanted, anything new and interesting.

Please self-pollinate if rare.
Description or picture of pod parent plant desirable.

Send seeds or information
by September 15
to Louise Guerin,
Seed Exchange chair:
e-mail: siber@siber-sonic.com

WANTED:

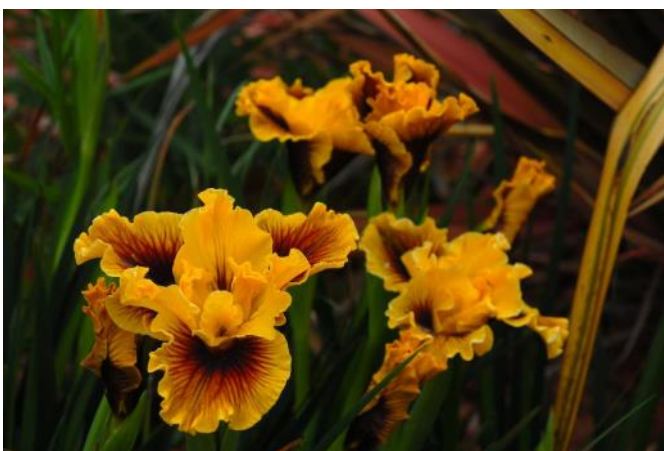
Landscape photographs that include Pacific Coast Irises

Are your PCI integrated into your landscape?
We'd like to show the world what that looks like.
Please send your name and photos to Ken Walker
and include your contact info if you'd like visitors.

Your sending implies permission for

SPCNI to use your photos at its discretion.

John Taylor seedlings from Australia



John Taylor seedlings from Australia

