Pacific Iris

Almanac of the Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris

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Tomas Tamberg diploid Calsibes






A selection of diploid Calsibes bred by German Dr Tomas Tamberg. These are hybrids between Pacific Coast Native Irises and members of the Sino-Siberian group of irises. More detail on the progress of interbreeding between these two related groups can be found in pages 4-10.

Photographs from Tamberg's web page.

Cover photograph—Ron Busch-raised tetra Calsibes in the editor's garden.

Pacific Iris, Almanac of the Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris

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POSITIONS OPEN

Vice President—Field trips and garden tours; a good position for someone who wants to learn where to see PCI in the wild and in gardens on the West Coast.

Social Media Chair— keeping SPCNI active online, helping plan website updates, You Tube content and Facebook and other social sites.

Historian/Archivist Our long-serving historian Richard Richards has died, so we are looking for someone to help record and preserve our history.

In this issue:

Iris clarkei is one of the 40-chromosome Sino-Siberian irises involved in the development of hybrids with Pacific Coast Iris. The details are in the feature story in this issue.

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM THE SPCNI TREASURER

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PRINT ARTICLES

Check List of named PCI species and cultivars
2005
Lists species and named cultivars and hybrids to 2005. $9.00
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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 5.5 x 8.5
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
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Almanac Index, 2005,
includes the following indices: author, subject, species, hybrids, $4.00, or download free PDF from the SPCNI website.

All the above books are available digitally from the SPCNI website.

'Pacific Pixie' from Terry Aitken, 2013.

Photo—Aitken Salmon Creek

Editor's notes

Please read the impassioned plea from our Secretary Treasurer Kathleen Sayce on page 18. The SPCNI is in desperate need of new blood. Many of the office-bearers have been in place for a decade or more, and we need to freshen the board with new people, new energy and new ideas.
This is a widespread problem. All over the world, garden societies, Rotary Clubs, family history groups and other volunteer organizations are facing a future where dwindling membership will mean they'll have to go into recess.
The board has some ideas to sustain and grow interest in the little irises of the Pacific Coast and the dazzling hybrids that have been bred from them that we're all so passionate about.
If there's any way you can help, or if you think you know someone willing and able to contribute to the ongoing survival of the SPCNI please contact Kathleen.

This issue has some interesting stories about *Iris tenax.* Mike Unser reports on a trip through Lewis County last spring, looking for sites where this little charmer was blooming. I also found an interesting scientific paper about some experiments with germinating *I. tenax* seed.
There may be some clues for better germination in other PCN.
While searching for the *I. tenax* story I came across some information about its use in medicine, so there's a little bit about that too.

Steve Taniguchi has questions about the variability of color in his seedlings. It makes for interesting reading, and the photographs illustrate the points he makes very well.

Renowned iris and daylily breeder Bill Maryott has been playing with some seedlings derived from Joe Ghio seed. We showed a selection in the last issue. Bill posted some more on Facebook this spring so we took advantage of the chance to show again the potential of PCN as garden plants.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and please think about how you can help SPCNI thrive.

Gareth

Crossing the line

Words—Gareth Winter

The front cover of this season's issue of 'Pacific Iris' features an unusual subject – for a change it is not a glamour shot of a Pacific Coast iris. Instead it is a photograph of a hybrid which is half PCN – the other half is a Siberican Iris. It is a hybrid originally derived from the breeding program of German scientist and iris lover Dr Tomas Tamberg.

All the species of Pacific Coast Native Iris (PCN) have 40 chromosomes and are most closely related to the 40-chromosome group of Siberian irises, sometimes called the Sino-Siberians.
It seems likely that the ancestors of PCN migrated over the then existing Bering land bridge during the ice ages. The sea eventually replaced the land, and the genetic connection was lost, although many plants (including *Iris setosa*) can be found on both sides of the Bering Sea.

***Iris forrestii,* one of the Sino Siberian irises**
Photo– Iris Wiki

Pacific Coast Irises were left isolated from their kin, and evolved into the different species we find scattered along the Pacific coast. However, their shared ancestry means they can cross with the Sino-Siberians, although that almost always results in sterile plants.

There is another group of Siberian irises that only have 28 chromosomes. These are far more common in gardens than the Sino-Siberians species and have been extensively interbred resulting in many popular garden plants. They feature both diploid and tetraploid varieties, the latter tending to be larger flowered and more robust.

Perhaps the best known in the non-iris world is the 1932 diploid introduction 'Caesar's Brother', a very hardy purple flowered variety that grows to about 1.5 metres. In the 1950s Dr Lee Lenz, a valued early member of the SPCNI, managed to effect a cross between this old Siberian variety with a form of *I. douglasiana*, resulting in a violet-coloured plant he named 'Royal Californian'.

'Royal Californian', a cross between 'Caesar's Brother' and *I. douglasiana* raised by Dr Lee Lenz in the 1950s.

Photo- Iris Wiki

Jean Witt, another long-time member of the SPCNI and lover of species iris, managed to raise a seedling from an even older Siberian cultivar – 'Snow Queen', a collected form of *I. sanguinea* introduced in 1900. This she crossed with a yellow *I. innominata*, giving rise to 'Crimson Accent', an ivory-coloured flower with prominent crimson spathes. These very wide crosses are infertile, and the resultant plants are more of academic interest rather than useful as garden plants.

The 40-chromosome Siberians are more closely aligned to PCN species and their hybridisation is easier. Unfortunately, they're not as easy to grow as the 28-chromosome varieties in most gardens, doing best in the Pacific Northwest and in New England.

Hybrids between any of the plants in the two groups of irises (Pacific Coast Natives and Siberians) are generally known as Calsibes, drawing their name from the original description of Pacific Coast irises as Californian irises.

The 40-chromosome Siberian-PCN hybrids got off to a great start - the very first English Dykes Medal was awarded to such a cross. Prominent nurseryman and plant breeder Amos Perry introduced irises he called 'Chrysowegii', derived from crossing the Siberian *I. chrysographes* with the Pacific Coast Native *I. hartwegii*. The best of these, 'Margot Holmes', with dark maroon species-like flowers was registered and won the Dykes in 1927.

The Dykes Medal winning 'Margot Holmes.'
Photo– Iris Wiki

He also crossed among the Pacific Coast iris, registering a cross between *I. douglasiana* and *I. bracteata* which he called 'Dougbract'. He then crossed that with Sino-Siberian *I. forrestii*, the resultant plant being registered as 'Dougbractifor'.

Another name well-known in iris circles at the time also introduced a hybrid between the two groups of irises – Carl Starker, perhaps best-known for his promotion of the pink flowering form of the winter-flowering *I. unguicularis* that bears his name, 'Starker's Pink', found a plant that was probably a hybrid of *I. tenax* with an unidentified Siberian variety. As it was a natural hybrid rather than a planned cross, it was called 'By a bee'. With its violet standards and purple falls it was sometimes mistaken for 'Margot Holmes'.

Carl Starker also introduced a rare albino form of *I. douglasiana*, originally sold as 'White' but is now better known as 'Agnes James'. According to some sources it was the only pure white form of *I. douglasiana* found in the wild. It was used for breeding purposes in the 1940s and 1950s.

The excitement of the possibility of the new 40-chromosome Calsibe hybrids was very much muted by their sterility – there seemed to be no way forward in breeding a new class of irises and interest waned.

The prospect of such hybrids was revived in the 1960s, with SPCNI stalwart Jean Witt to the forefront. Interested in a wide range of iris species, she raised several hybrids that showed the influence of the Siberian lines she used.

'Lyric Laughter' was produced by crossing a yellow 40 chromosome Siberian seedling (almost certainly *I. forrestii*) with a lemon *I. innominata* seedling, resulting in a lovely flower with very light-yellow standards, and yellow falls, with a deeper yellow signal patch and brown veins. Flowering at about two feet, it flowers very late in the season. Its sibling 'Golden Waves' is deeper in colour.

'Lyric Laughter' -
Photo—Cascadia Iris Gardens

Jean Witt also bred a remarkable seedling that resembles *I. missouriensis*, calling it 'Fauxmo'. Slightly smaller than 'Lyric Laughter', it is also a late blooming variety.

Jean Witt's 'Fauxmo'
Photo—Cascadia Iris Gardens

Other breeders were active too. Washington-based Leona Mahood produced a couple of very interesting hybrids also using a cross between an *I. innominata* seedling crossed with a Sino-Siberican seedling.
'El Tigre' has yellow-coloured standards and falls, but is so heavily stippled and dotted with brown that it gives a rusty brown effect.

'Fair Colleen' bred by crossing an *I. douglasiana* seedling with a Siberica seedling has white ground covered with blue-lavender lines. It is an early blooming variety, whereas 'El Tigre' flowers late in the season.

Another hybridiser was working with 40-chromosome Siberians – Lorena Reid of Springfield, Oregon – and she also grew other beardless irises, including Pacific Coast Natives. She crossed some of the more advanced PCNs being introduced by Joe Ghio and others. She released several cultivars, many showing the influence of the Siberian side of the cross.

Among the first was 'In Stitches', which she introduced in 1987. A cross between 'Golden Nymph', a yellow PCN variety crossed with a seedling from her Mirza Citronella strain of Sino-Siberians, it has light violet flowers with contrasting deeper 'stitches'. It grows to about 60cm.

'In Stitches'
Photo—Carla Lankow

She also introduced a series of CalSibes with the forename of Pacific – 'Pacific Starprint', a nice purple derived from her Sino-Siberian 'Enbee Deeaych' crossed with Ghio's 'Wild Party' PCN. A similar cultivar from the same cross was called 'Pacific Smoothie'.

Left: 'El Tigre'. By Leona Mahood
Photo - Carla Lankow

'Pacific Smoothie'
Photo– Iris Wiki

The same Sino-Siberian, when crossed with Ghio's 'Bubbly' gave rise to a deep red-violet cultivar called 'Pacific Red Velvet'. She also crossed the well-known PCN 'Pacific Rim' with a seedling Sino-Siberian derived from Tomas Tamberg's Sino-Siberian hybrid 'Beautiful Forty'. This resulted in 'Pacific Wildwood'.

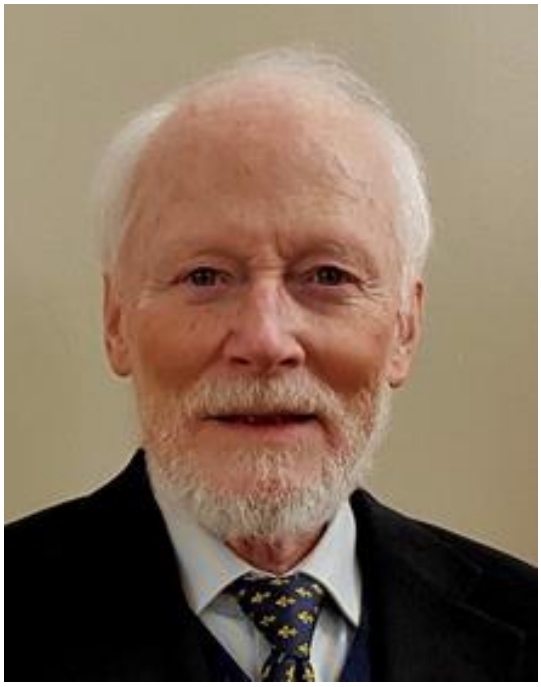
'Pacific Wildwood'
Photo—Iris Wiki

More recently, Carla Lankow crossed one of her Sino-Siberian seedlings with Joe Ghio's near-red 'Escalona' to produce 'Rubicon' a Calsibe that approaches red shades and grows about 40cm high.

'Rubicon'
Photo– Cascadia Iris Gardens

In popular parlance, "Crossing the Rubicon" means passing a point of no return, but unfortunately that does not apply to these Calsibes. All the above mentioned plants are sterile, so there was no opportunity to establish breeding lines from them.

Enter Tomas Tamberg.



Tomas Tamberg -
Photo—ex Tamberg website

Tamberg was a scientist working in nuclear fuel analysis and analytical chemistry in Germany. However, he also had a love of gardening and plant breeding, particularly irises and Hemerocallis. His first foray into the iris breeding was with TBs but the acidic nature of his Berlin garden persuaded him to switch his interest to Siberian varieties.

He became interested in Currier McEwen's tetraploid Siberians (of the 28-chromosome group) and soon started experimenting with other kinds of iris. He raised a range of interesting seedlings by crossing Sino-Siberians and PCNs, including some very attractive plants.

Tamberg Sino-Siberian 'Western Movie'
Photo– Tamberg website

Tamberg Sino-Siberian seedling
Photo– Tamberg website

However, he was frustrated that the plants he created were all infertile. Realising that the Sino-Siberian and PCN irises both had 40 chromosomes, he deduced that by introducing tetraploidy to both classes he would be able to produce fertile cultivars.

This can be achieved by conversion of specimens from either group, or from the conversion of sterile diploid Calsibes. He used colchicine, a drug derived from the autumn-flowering Colchicum bulbs. The first of these tetraploids – called 'Starting Calsibe' - was introduced in 1983, a lavender flower with deeper lines.

Starting Calsibe
Photo—Iris Wiki

Both he and other breeders have introduced several new cultivars. Prolific breeder, and President of the American Iris Society, David Niswonger introduced several cultivars, including 'Berlin-Cape Connection', a descendant of 'Starting Calsibe.' British irisarian Peter Maynard has also released a number of varieties, using 'Goring' as a forename.

Peter Maynard's 'Goring Butterfly'
Photo— daylily-phlox.eu

French breeder Jean-Claude Jacob, is another who has been working in this area. As well as introducing many PCN cultivars, he has also released several Calsibes.

'Barnenez' - a 2023 introduction from Jean Claude Jacob of France Photo—Iris Wiki

Tomas Tamberg has taken the next step with his CalSibe breeding programme– he has been crossing back to both tetra PCNs and Sino-Siberians, giving birth to cultivars he calls Sibcals. The flowers are extremely attractive, but they are unfortunately infertile.

Neither PCNs nor SinoSiberians are easy to grow outside their natural range – there are many areas of the world where their cultivation is difficult or impossible. However, in areas where they thrive (and New Zealand is one such area) they are among the most beautiful of garden plants.

Some years ago, an iris mad near-neighbour called Terry Johnson, whose interest was mainly in historic irises (especially those of New Zealand breeder Jean Stevens) and Siberians, called to say he had located some Tamberg-derived plants growing in the South Island.

Terry was a devotee of the New Zealand breeder Ron Busch, who mainly bred TBs but also registered a few Calsibes. Ron has passed on but many of his varieties had been saved and were being grown on for further appraisal, although their names had been lost. Among those plants were a few Calsibes. Eventually a sampling of them made their way into my garden. They are wonderful plants, growing about 60cm high, and mostly heavily veined over pale ground colours. But there are some with darker base colours.

Left: Two Tomas Tamberg Sibcals showing the interesting patterns that can be developed from crosses involving Pacific Coast cultivars and Sino-Siberian irises.

Above: One of the seedlings from Ron Busch. He named many varieties after the area of New Zealand that he lived in—Irwell.

This may be one called 'Irwell Mama Mia'.

Although they may not be the most exciting flowers, these plants have a very important attribute – they flower at least a month later than our PCN.
This is important because we are very prone to late frosts which can severely damage the stems of the many PCN we grow. Some years we lose nearly half the flowers. This is especially noticeable in an El Nino year, such as last year, when we get hotter summers but correspondingly colder and longer winters.

An unidentified Ron Busch Calsibe cultivar.

I have tried to cross these Busch plants a couple of times without success. They always develop lovely looking seedpods, but they are ballons – empty of any seeds - until this year, when I harvested a handful of seed. They've been sown along with this years PCN - here's hoping for germination!

It seems to me that the future success of Calsibes depends on development of the class, with seedlings from more modern varieties being converted to tetraploidy.

It requires the most up-to-date hybrids of both Sino-Siberians and PCNs. Even the Ghio varieties that have been used thus far have been 30 or more years old – imagine what could be achieved by using some of the recent varieties raised by Joe Ghio , Garry Knipe or John Taylor.

Travis McEwen has recently shifted to California and is discovering PCN. From the top, *I. macrosiphon,* *I. longipetala* and *I. douglasiana,* all at U.C. Santa Cruz.

Exploring *Iris tenax* in Lewis County, Washington State, USA

Mike Unser

In late 2022 I was contacted by Kathleen Sayce with the suggestion of doing an exploration of the areas where *Iris tenax* was growing in Lewis Co., WA, which is just south of Olympia where I live. I had already been doing some exploration here in Thurston Co. for places where *I. tenax* was continuing to grow and thought this was a capital idea. So, in May of 2023 my husband Daniel and I set out to explore the rural roads around Centralia and Chehalis, WA, using the article from the September 2022 SIGNA bulletin from by Kenneth Walker as a starting point. Our goal was to travel the roads in the surrounding area marking places where we could see *I. tenax* blooming and create a map of this information to help others that were searching for wild populations.

We set off on a lovely, clear and sunny Sunday and enjoyed a pleasant day of driving about, setting markers where we saw good shows of the irises. The habitat was, of course, roadsides and ditches where the irises competed with grasses and other plants for space, and the edges of woodlands where they could get enough sun.

I think they liked the roadsides so much because the county keeps them clear of brush and trees to prevent wildfires sparking easily. We also saw them growing in profusion under power line right of ways.

Many of the roads are not safe to stop on and have little to no room to pull over to a shoulder to get out for a closer look, so the bulk of our trip was observation from the moving vehicle.

We explored around the eastern side of the cities and then went to the western side as well. We found the irises were far more prolific and widespread on the eastern side. The height and flower size were uniform throughout our observations, however colors ranged from very pale orchid-lavender bordering on white to deep orchid and lavender.

We didn't observe any pure white varieties on our travels, although I've seen them in our own County.

Much of this area was historically open prairie maintained by the native tribes who kept the forest at bay with regular burns. The irises were one of many prairie plants that were encouraged as a resource by the native population who used them to braid strong ropes and twines for use in nets.
Which begs the question of whether the irises are naturally indigenous to this area and are remnant populations left over from the end of the last ice age that predate the forests or were they brought here by people as a desirable resource from areas in Oregon.

If anyone has information on this I'd be interested to hear from you. Without the active care of people, the forests have grown over in places where farming and range land for livestock were not prepared by settlers – conditions and activities which aren't conducive to the well-being of the irises.

This was a fun informal survey to do, and I look forward to adding to it in coming years. We've also heard there are populations in Grays Harbor Co. that we would like to explore next spring. Anyone with information to share on the whereabouts of native irises of Washington State is welcome to contact me at garden.of.mu (at) gmail (dot) com.

Germination of *Iris tenax*

Gareth Winter

A recent paper by Katherine D Jones and Thomas N Kaye looked at germination rates in *Iris tenax*. Jones is a botanist at Oregon State University, while Kaye works at the Institute for Applied Ecology at Corvallis, Oregon.

Their interest in the project was environmental. The grassland prairies of western Oregon and Washington are among the most endangered ecosystems in the United States. For example, the Willamette Valley in western Oregon has lost 99.5% of its pre-European settlement prairie habitat, while the Puget Trough grasslands have been reduced to about 10% of their historic extent.

Iris tenax **on a prairie hillside**
Photo– Wikimedia

Prior to European settlement these areas were a mix of coniferous forests, oak savannas and grassland prairies, but urbanisation, conversion to agriculture and the natural succession to shrubland and forest has led to their drastic diminution. The grasslands are now fragmented, and there is a risk that the populations of species that remain are too small and lacking in genetic diversity to be sustainable. It is clear that native species reintroduction and population augmentation will be needed to restore these habitats.

It is important that *I. tenax* be an integral part of the vegetation restoration project, as it is a potential source of nectar for endangered butterflies from western Washington to northern California.

Past experiences with sowing *I. tenax* seed have been disappointing and its restoration has largely been carried out using container grown stock.

Iris tenax
Photo– Wikimedia

Many iris species demonstrate dormancy, and studies have shown that warm stratification, cold stratification, physical scarification and physical scarification can break dormancy, but little work has been undertaken on upland species, and none on *I. tenax*.

The study, which was partially funded by the Portland Garden Club and the Native Plant Society of Oregon, focussed on stratification temperatures and durations because physiological dormancy is common in the geographic region and stratification often breaks this kind of dormancy.

Three experiments were carried out. The first looked at cold and warm stratification alone and in combination.

For those unfamiliar with the technique, stratification involves mixing the seed with moist sand, peat moss or vermiculite to help moisture levels remain constant, then placing the mix in a sealable plastic bag or container.

Warm stratification means keeping the seed/sand mix at about room temperature, 60-70°F (15-21°C), whereas cold means keeping the mix at about 40°F (5°C). For home gardeners, this can be achieved by storing in a domestic fridge.

The second experiment involved applying short periods of dry heat followed by cold stratification. The third experiment tested seeds from wild populations to evaluate the results of the first two experiments.

Iris tenax
Photo- Peter Pearsall
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The experiments involved a wide range of both warm and cold stratification periods, with the longest periods matching what would be expected in the wild. Interestingly, mold developed on many of the seeds in both the stratification and germination periods, but a lot of these seeds still germinated.

Details of the processes used in the experiment can be found at https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0090084.

In summary, both warm and cold stratification affected germination. Mean germination was greatest after four weeks of warm stratification followed by cold wet stratification for 8 to 10 weeks.

Seed coat removal was ineffective at breaking dormancy, as was gibberellic acid which is sometimes used in crop seeds.

The researchers suggest that the embryo elongates, and cells differentiate during the warm stratification, then germination inhibitors are leached from the seed during the cold stratification. They suggest this may mimic what happens in the wild. The seeds are produced in the spring then mature in June. Following July dispersal they are subjected to warm summer temperatures. Although this is a dry period in western Oregon, residual soil moisture and the high temperatures may combine to create warm stratification.

The slow leaching of inhibitors during the cold, wet winter, followed by warming temperatures in early spring may allow emergence of the radicle and shoot in the favourable conditions.

The seed used in the experiments was gathered from different parts of Oregon and the germination was consistent except for seed from Silver Falls, which had been stored for two years. The researchers noted the quality of the seed seemed low and exceptionally high mold growth was noticed in some treatments.

They reported that it was possible that priming the seeds with warm stratification may prove to be a valuable pre-treatment for fall sowing, allowing the cool and wet winter to complete the dormancy breaking process and initiate germination the following spring. They recommended that trials of this technique should be undertaken before application in restoration projects.

Even if this doesn't occur, the warm-followed-by-cold-stratification process can increase the efficiency of seed germination and increase the availability of container grown *Iris tenax* for restoration purposes.

***Iris tenax*—Photo—Wikimedia**

Variable Color Intensity in Pacific Coast Native Iris

Words and photos : Steve Taniguchi

I've noticed that some PCI flowers vary in color intensity. I'm not referring to an individual flower fading with time, but rather the flowers on a particular variety being different from year to year. The following seedling photos (I don't have good photos of named varieties taken at different years, so I had to use seedling photos) were taken at two different years, showing extremes in appearance. I noticed that the flowers in 2021 seemed to be darker than the flowers from other years. In some cases, the flowers look like they're from a completely different plant (for example, 14-03B).

My guess is that the difference is based on temperature, but I have no data to support my guess as I 've not recorded temperatures for each year. Another possibility is that it is related to soil pH and the amount of color depends on whether I have applied acid fertilizer or not. A third possibility is that flower color intensity is related to the amount of sunlight received. Of course, I don't keep track of those variables either.

I've seen this same variation in color intensity with some of the named varieties. So how do we know what a particular variety is supposed to look like? One reference that you can use is the AIS wiki at https://wiki.irises.org/. There are sections in the wiki for each of the various types of irises. I find the wiki a valuable resource for viewing the appearance of a particular named variety. Users can view the photos without registering for the wiki. If you register for the wiki, you are allowed to upload photos you've taken of registered named varieties into the database.

Back to my original concern. Has anyone else noticed differences in flower color intensity? Are all pigments affected the same or differently? Does anyone know what causes this?

Seedling 05-02H : flowering in 2020 above, 2021 to the right

Seedling 13-01 : flowering in 2016 above, 2021 to the right


Seedling 06-01RYS : flowering in 2009 above, 2019 to the right. It usually looks like 2019


Seedling 14-03B 2019 above, 2021 to the right. The appearance varies between the two extremes shown above, but often looks like the 2019 version.


Seedling 19-06G, flowering in 2021 above, and 2022 to the right. It has only bloomed the last three years, so I do not know its usual appearance.

Wonderful (and odd) world of Pacific Coast Iris

Gareth Winter

When I started looking for information on *Iris tenax*, which features in two of our stories this issue, I thought I should check to see if there have been any recent scientific research on it. I was very surprised to see it turning up in the Indian Journal of Research in Homoeopathy.

Two researchers from the National Homeopathy Research Institute in Mental Health in Kottayam, Kerala, India reported that they had used an extract derived from *Iris tenax* to treat recurrent subacute appendicitis. They reported that there was a marked improvement in the second week of treatment.

The extract, which is made from both roots and leaves, is also used homoeopathically to treat abdominal pain, vertigo, acidity, mouth ulcer, dry mouth and constipation.

It made me wonder if there is any other research into cultural properties on Pacific Coast Irises. I found a paper published last year in the International Journal of Science and Research where Sasha Nealand and Christine L. Case from the Biology Department, Skyline College, San Bruno, California investigated the possibility of the antimicrobial properties of *Iris douglasiana.*

As they pointed out in the paper, it had been used by Californian native tribes to treat skin sores. They discovered that *Iris douglasiana* rhizomes act as a bactericide against *Staphylococcus aureus* and may be useful to develop new antibiotics.

Other papers mention that native tribes made tea from the roots of *I. douglasiana*, while others chewed the roots to cure coughs. The Modoc used a decoction to soothe sore eyes.

Farmers are less keen on Douglas iris, as the leaves are bitter and unpalatable, and can become weedy in pasture. Most of us probably think a field of Douglas iris would be a wonderful thing, but perhaps if your livelihood depended on the field growing grass you might not be so enthralled.

A field of Douglas iris
Photo—Wikimedia

Of course, *I. douglasiana*, along with other species, was used to make ropes by native tribes, said to be among the finest. However, the process was long and arduous as only two fibres could be taken from each leaf edge.

Large amounts of foliage would be gathered in the fall, then women would use mussel shells or abalone "thumbnails" to strip the fibre from the leaf, making sure any other tissue was cleaned. The men would then twist the threads on their bare thighs. It was a time consuming process – according to one informant, it took six weeks to make a 20-foot long rope used to lasso deer. The cords were also used to make fishing nets and camping bags.

Kathleen Sayce made cordage from *I. douglasiana* leaves a few years ago, using a simple three strand twist of dead *Iris douglasiana* leaves. Using fine thin leaves, this worked up quickly into cord. These cords can be twisted together or braided to make stronger ropes.

Reports on the utility of *I. macrosiphon* indicate it was used for many of the same purposes as Douglas iris, including cordage.
Interestingly, it was also applied for the removal of freckles!

Fresh blood needed!

Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris (SPCNI) has had a stable board for more than a decade. Now several people are stepping down, or need or desire to do so due to health or work conflicts. If you grow Pacific Coast Iris, or are interested in growing them, and are willing to serve on a board, please contact the Secretary.
Meetings are virtual, and except for the Secretary/Treasurer and Editor, duties are light.
We don't require people to live in a particular state, or even in the US—all that you need is an interest in and some knowledge of this fascinating iris series.

Like many iris societies, we would like to have a more active presence on social media, and are looking for younger people with those skills, as well as more traditional officer skills, and creative publication skills. For those who are interested, we will arrange a zoom meeting to meet some of the board and talk over duties and expectations, and opportunities for new board members. We plan to hire a paid web manager this year, and to restructure memberships to help pay for this expense. SPCNI has around 200 members, and is financially viable as an organization.

SPCNI is looking for new board members for all positions: President, Vice President, Alternate Vice President (in charge of field trips), Secretary/CFO (which could be split into two positions), seed exchange chair, and possibly a new editor, and an image collection chair.

SPCNI owes every present board member deep thanks for their years of service. Some of their contributions are mentioned here. We've been without active vice presidents for many years.

SPCNI thanks Bob Sussman for his 14 years as president, since 2010. He owns a nursery, Matilija Nursery, which specializes in native plants in southern California.

Debby Cole has stayed on as past president during his tenure; she has given more than 20 years to SPCNI as a board member in several positions.

Bob Seaman gave SPCNI a decade of dedicated service as web manager. He rebuilt SPCNI's website and then kept it updated then while running his own nursery, Leonine Iris, in Seattle, WA. He moved the seed online, and met the challenges every year of keeping that platform working during each seed catalog.

Kathleen Sayce has been Secretary/CFO since 2009, during which she worked full time, then retired, and now manages her husband's care in recovery from Lyme disease while serving on several nonprofit boards. What has fallen behind are several books on native plants she intended to finish writing! And her garden!

Louise Guerin runs the SPCNI seed exchange while working full time at Huntington Gardens, and serving on other local plant society boards. SPCNI's seed exchange is the largest distribution network for PCI seeds in the US, with the most variety in its offerings. She has kept it going despite new challenges in shipping seeds inside the US and internationally.

Gareth Winter, our editor, retired from his former job as archivist in New Zealand, and continues to write books while composing gorgeous ***Pacific Iris*** issues twice a year. He restyled and renamed this publication, giving it a wonderful, new visual style. SPCNI found the money to print issues in full color following this restyling.

Ken Walker, our image collection chair, has done a great job of compiling historic and modern PCI images and keeping current on new varieties. He's been a resource for many in SPCNI, sharing images of species and varieties for display, including a forthcoming article in the AIS Bulletin.

All have helped SPCNI thrive, but collectively, we all know, for different reasons, that it is time to turn over this organization to the next team of creative and dedicated people.

If you are interested, please contact Kathleen Sayce for more information, orders@pacificcoastiris.org

'Now Showing' in Ken Walker's garden
Photo– Gareth Winter

Bill Maryott seedlings 2024