Tribute to Ian Efford, BCIS Director

This issue of the Rainbow Goddess is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Ian Efford, scientist, friend and BCIS member.

The iris and plant world in general lost a good friend and a good guy when Dr. Ian Efford of Duncan, B.C., passed away suddenly on June 7. Born in Hackney London UK in 1936, Ian had a distinguished educational background with a Ph. D. in Ecology from Oxford and followed by post-doctoral Research in Oceanography at the University of California. He was a Professor of Ecology at the University of British Columbia where he directed a huge lake ecology research project at Marion Lake that involved 40 scientists who produced over 100 published papers over 12 years.

BCIS 2020 AGM Teleconference
This Sunday, June 28, 7pm
Details on page 10
Please join us!
In 1964 he was invited to join the Canadian Medical Expedition to Rapa Nui (Easter Island). He took with him one of his graduate students and they explored the marine life in particular. This adventure for Ian was recently written up in a book called Stanley’s Dream by Jacalyn Duffin of Queen’s University.

He later served as Director General of Conservation and Renewable Energy for the Government of Canada where he supervised a staff complement of more than 3000 and a budget of $500 million. He worked for the Canadian International Development Agency on African development projects and was well travelled and knowledgeable about many countries, cultures and challenges.

In retirement, he founded the Ottawa Botanic Garden Society. Luckily for Vancouver Island and BC Ian and his wife Shirley chose the Cowichan Valley to settle down in. He became an active member of the Rhododendron Society (CVRS) and the CV Garden Club. He founded the highly successful annual Cowichan Valley Garden Fair.

Ian just completed a brand-new home in North Cowichan and was establishing an impressive new garden for his family, friends and himself to enjoy.

He was an especially talented plant propagator of many iris species and types. An enormously generous person he shared his ideas, knowledge, plants and good humour with his many friends and colleagues. He had an enquiring, scientific mind that was an incredible repository of interesting knowledge about many things including rhododendrons, iris, peony and other plant species. Most recently he contributed a paper on bumblebees and pollinators in the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) journal.

Last fall he was awarded the Silver Medal by the ARS for his many contributions which included a popular book on the Rhododendron Gardens of Vancouver Island and a written history of the CVRS. He held memberships in many plant and ecology-related organizations including the BC Iris Society and the Alpine Plant Society among others. He was a prolific writer on many aspects of the plant world including an article in this issue of the Rainbow Goddess.

He was a BCIS director and a guest speaker at a past BCIS AGM and was scheduled for a panel discussion at this year’s AGM.

Ian and Shirley were regular participants in rhododendron and iris tours and garden visits. They were also particularly kind to stray animals and adopted many grateful rescue dogs.

He is survived by his wife Shirley, four children and twelve grandchildren.

He will be well remembered and loved by all who had the distinct pleasure of knowing him.

Bill Dumont, Editor
President’s message: a special tribute issue and a wealth of knowledge, experiences, and images

Richard Hebda, President BCIS

Sadly, in June we lost Dr. Ian Efford, a most remarkable iris expert, BCIS Director, newsletter contributor and amazing gentleman. This issue of the Rainbow Goddess is dedicated to him, his contributions and to the memory of our generous friend. Bill Dumont (BCIS Secretary and Treasurer) provides an appreciation of this amazing man.

For my part, I first knew Ian when I was a young graduate student at the University of British Columbia in the 1970s. Over the years, in my role as Royal BC Museum Curator, we exchanged several notes and letters concerning natural history observations in BC and beyond. When it came to questions of iris species and biology, Ian was my go-to source, especially since I joined BCIS. I recall fondly his presentation to the BCIS several years ago. He stimulated our interest in species irises and wrote an authoritative, widely-circulated article on growing them from seed. I will remember Ian for his boundless good humour and generosity. I have several of Ian’s plants. He donated iris clumps to the BCIS display gardens at the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific, where they will keep his boundless inquisitive spirit alive. To a true natural historian and irisarian, you will be missed.

We are incredibly fortunate to have a treasure chest of articles in this issue of the Rainbow Goddess. The contributions range from descriptions of experiences with historic and modern bearded varieties and Dutch irises (Richard Hebda), successes with irises in the Okanagan (Lesia and Gerry Lalonde and Penny Santosham, and companion peonies on the coast (Ted Baker and Malcolm Ho-You) for the iris garden. Ian Efford contributed a valuable article on literature about species irises before he passed away.

This newsletter also includes information about this year’s Teleconference AGM this Sunday at 7 pm. Please join us. We had to cancel our original AGM in March due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

By many accounts, this has been a mostly excellent year for iris blooms in British Columbia. We include links to virtual garden tours with beautiful irises for you to enjoy (compiled by Bill Dumont).

I share an image of my ever-reliable, pot-grown “Latino”. Keith Keppel introduced this strong Intermediate Bearded iris (IB) in 2005. Its colour this year was particularly vivid.

Intermediate Bearded (IB) iris “Latino” in bloom May 9, 2020, Saanich Peninsula, B.C. (Photo - Richard Hebda)
A Royal Resident in Downtown Victoria: Crimson King at the Crystal Court Motel

Richard Hebda, President BCIS

Since 1950 (according to the Times Colonist newspaper) the Crystal Court Motel in downtown Victoria provided an inexpensive alternative to the famous Empress Hotel. Run by the same family until 2003 it was sold and recently torn down to be replaced by a mixed-use development. Large elevated planters grew shrubs and irises for many decades for visitors to enjoy as part of Victoria’s tourist experience. This iris has likely been there for more than 50 years and I had seen it for 35 years but paid little attention. I rescued a few rhizome fragments of this very vigorous grower and nurtured four clumps in my garden. It flowered prolifically this year, so I set out to discover its identity.

With Cathy Egerer’s (Past President of the Historical Iris Preservation Society - HIPS) help my pictures of it found their way to Phil Edinger, an expert in identifying historical irises and he was quick of the mark with a name and story. Quoting Phil’s e-mail: “This is the ‘common purple’ that was all over southern California when I was a kid. Actually, all over CA west of the Sierras. When I joined the Southern CA Iris Society, I quickly learned that it’s Crimson King (Barr 1893). It’s a germanica, probably something collected, sent to Barr, and named by him (a la Princess Beatrice). Where winter is mild to essentially absent (e.g. coastal southern CA), this will flower at least three times a year. Plants mature quickly, then send up stems—and increases. It is tough. I swear it would grow in asphalt if it were planted in it.”

A century-old iris in a historic town (Victoria), one wonders how the owners of the motel got it, almost certainly from a local source. When I checked the US National Plants Gardening Association Plants Database, I also discovered that it was sweetly scented. I have never bent down to smell it and it is too late this year. Who knows it may bloom again before the year is out.

Crimson King is an Intermediate Bearded iris (IB), mine growing to 40-50 cm (16-20”) tall, other sources have it reaching 60 cm (24”). It has a tidy growth form and produces many closely spaced fans. Flowers are officially bi-tone and according to the Cornell Extension Bulletin #112: they are intense violet-purple, self-coloured; the “standards being pansy violet, lighter to yellowish on claw and wavy along edge.” Falls are “cotinga” purple and have a velvety texture. “The veining is boldly spaced on the whitish outer haft.” Apparently according to the Cornell Bulletin, “the persistent green foliage is attractive in winter”. Beards are largely white. As my two images illustrate, standards and falls are a bit floppy. Blooms are produced in great numbers, early and over a long season.

According to the Plants Database, the iris is remarkably hardy to US Department of Agriculture zone 3, meaning that it can grow in much of BC.

This venerable centenarian may not be a modern iris superstar, but it sure makes a good subject for a low-care corner of the garden.

The Crystal Court may be gone but its Crimson King lives on!
An Introduction to Iris Species Literature  

Ian E. Efford, BCIS Director  

I have never grown *Iris koreana* before and when it first flowered, I thought that it was *Sisyrinchium californicum* [Yellow-Eyed Grass] which is found in the wild on the southern end of Vancouver Island. The iris is very small at 10cm. and planted in a row of 1m. tall *Iris ensata*, looks a little out of place.  

In nature in Korea and neighbouring provinces of China, this iris grows into large patches that are covered with these bright yellow flowers. At the moment, I have it growing in a new nursery bed with good soil and quite a lot of humus. James Waddick, however, says that it will die if the soil is too rich and that its normal habitat is sandy grassland in exposed areas, similar to *Sysyrinchium*. When he wrote this comment, no one in North America was growing this species. Since then others have grown it and it is now considered to have a wider tolerance for better soil. Wikipedia refers to articles that state that “It likes soils that are moist (especially in the winter and spring), rich and between strongly acidic to[o] alkaline”. In South Korea, it is considered a threatened species and this is even more the case for the closely related species *I. odaesanensis* which has white flowers and is found only on the top of Mount Odaesan in N.E. South Korea near to the border with North Korea. I grow this species too but it has not yet flowered.  

Wikipedia gives two references which state that *Iris koreana* “is also similar to the American woodland native, *Iris cristata*.” which forms large patches in the eastern North American woods. There is actually very little resemblance.  

They are both about 10cm. and that seems to be the only point of resemblance. Notice the relatively long, narrow leaves in *I. koreana* and the much broader leaves in *I. cristata*. The latter is a crested iris with a very distinct crest. The two cannot be considered similar.  

I mention this rare iris as an example of a species which is very interesting and can lead one to search various books for more information. Below I provide notes on a selected list of references that are reliable and cover the topic well.  

I should note that trying to learn about species by reading any of these books from cover to cover will bore you and result in your abandoning the project! The best approach is to take a question and find the answer by reading the appropriate section in more than one book. In this way, over time, you will build up knowledge and understanding of the irises.  

**An Overview of the Family**  
*The Iris Family: Natural History and Classification*, Goldblatt, P. and J.C. Manning, 2008  

This is a detailed overview of all the iris genera in the world with beautiful photographs of most of them. Once you see the photographs of the Southern Africa genera, you will want some in your garden! Bulbs for many of them are available in North America and, with care, many of them will survive quite well in our winter climate although they are more at home in the hot dry conditions found in the southern states and the Okanagan region of British Columbia.  

**A Historical Classic**  
*The Genus Iris*, Dykes, W.R., 1912  

This is a classic in the iris literature - it was the first serious study of the genus. Furthermore, it is illustrated by a large number of beautiful, anatomically accurate, watercolours. The book has a great deal of information, but it should be remembered that it was published in 1913 and many things have changed since then, particularly species names. The original printing is rare and very expensive but Dover Publications reprinted it in 1974 and a second-hand copy should be affordable and well worth it for any iris enthusiast.
Two Important References for Identifying Species

**The Iris**, Mathew, B., 1981
Brian Mathew was the iris authority at The Royal Botanic Garden at Kew and his book is a very readable summary of knowledge of iris species at that time. It also describes his experiences at cultivating each species. I refer to this book a great deal.

**A Guide to Species Iris and their identification and Cultivation**, Species Group BIS, 1997
This is probably the best and most accurate description of all the known iris species at the time it was written. It is the result of the collaboration of many British experts, each one writing about the subgenus they knew best. The effort was coordinated by the Species Group of the British Iris Society. I suggest that it is the one book that should be in the library of anyone interested in the genus.

Expert Studies on Individual Groups of Irises
There is a monograph about almost all the groups of irises. Four that I know about are listed below.

**The Siberian Iris**, McEwen, C., 1996

Currier McEwen is the father of the hybridization of the Siberian and Japanese irises and many of the most popular ones grown in present-day gardens originated in his retirement garden on a peninsula on the coast of Maine.


**The Pictorial Book of Iris laevigata**, Horinaka, A., 1990
This book was published privately and may not be available. It is in Japanese with an English section and good photographs. [This beautifully produced book may be very difficult to find. My copy came directly from the author and its arrival was delayed for many months because of disruption caused by an earthquake.]

In addition, I would add:

**Iris of China**, Waddick, J.W. and Zhao Yu-tang, 1992
This contains a technical description of the species and also an account by James Waddick on their cultivation.

I do not know of any book about the desert irises, such as Junos. There is a rumour that Tony Hall, who is the present iris expert at Kew and an authority on Junos, is writing a book about irises but, to my knowledge, it has not yet appeared. There are, however, a number of articles on this topic, such as:

I recommend two specific books on iris species for detailed factual information, the best one is the Species Group 1997 publication and for general reading Brian Mathew’s *The Iris*.

If you do not have an overview of all the irises and want to read about them before focusing your interest, I recommend:

**The Gardener’s Iris Book**, Shear, W., 1998
I recommend this because, being in paperback, it is inexpensive, and was written by someone with a scientific background and is technically accurate.

A similar book but much more expensive and lavishly illustrated is:

Graeme Grosvenor was a professor of mathematics in Australia and so the seasons are reversed in the text. Furthermore, the illustrations are by a professional photographer who loved to play with colour so a number of the photos are of colours that he “imagined” irises will be in the future!

Quite a few other books exist on irises, particularly on bearded irises, but they focus on the aesthetic aspects and have little factually accurate information.

Finally, there have been a number of technical conferences on species in this genus and the proceedings of those conferences contain a mine of information. Otherwise, an excellent source of up to date information is S.I.G.N.A. which publishes a journal with articles about iris species from around the world and has an excellent seed exchange.
Being an Explorer
Lesia Lalonde, Sage Hill Farm & Gardens, Penticton

Gardeners being gardeners we are always exploring to add something new to our gardens each year. We’ve always had a few irises in our flower beds but became interested in growing more after the BCIS Garden Tour in 2013 and the rest is history. Each year we collected more and more median and tall bearded irises. In 2017 we were asked if we had ever thought about growing Arilbred Irises. We knew nothing about Arilbreds. After some research, we discovered that Arilbreds are exotic-looking flowers that have large, globular blooms, a dark signal spot below the beard, and intricate veining. Arilbred irises come in so many different colours and patterns. They prefer conditions that are on the dry side during the heat of summer and the cold of winter so the growing conditions in the Okanagan might lend themselves well we thought. It remains to be seen.

When we discovered they where nowhere to be found in Canada, we placed an order with the BC Iris Society group order from Mid American in Oregon last year. The Arilbreds we chose were Dubai (T.Johnson ‘13), Perry Dyer (P. Black ‘17), Galaxina (P. Black ‘15) and Shimmy Shake (T.Johnson ‘19).

After taking much care and attention in planting our newest gems we discovered at a much later date that “Perry Dyer’s” rhizome had been uprooted by a deer hoof. The prognosis for Perry Dyer was not good as winter was setting in. As spring arrived this year, we eyed all the new irises with anticipation and hope. Three of the four were all getting new fans. With much intensive care, Perry Dyer is finally showing signs of life. Perry Dyer Arilbred was named for long time friend, mentor and dedicated supporter of AIS and has received the Fred and Barbara Walther Cup for 2019. Galaxina and Shimmy Shake (both one-quarter arilbreds) have both bloomed and we are waiting for the grand showing of Dubai (half-bred arilbred). After a great start in the spring looking vibrant and having shot up two strong stalks, it now appears to be hesitating.

Not surprising, on the cover of the April 2020 Aril Society International bulletin is pictured Dubai with it’s recurved falls and big red black signal spot. It has been named as the 2019 C.G. White Medal Winner. Since 1993, the Clarence G. White memorial medal has been awarded to the best arilbred iris with 1/2 or more aril ancestry. How pleased we are to have this award-winning spectacular arilbred in our Penticton garden!

The Aril Society International is composed of 286 active members (9 Canadians, 215 Domestic, 62 Foreign ~ non-USA/Canada). There is so much to learn about Arilbreds & Arils. For more information and reading on this, you can go to the Aril Society International website.
Of the more than 300 bearded irises we grow, we are often asked “Which is your favourite?” There are many beauties! Some stand out more than others again and again, and we will answer that “Dangerous Mood” (Schreiners ’04) is ONE of our many favourites. A neglecta with a sky blue standard with midnight black falls it is bold and eye-catching, this year producing 8 blossoms on a single stalk.

In the spring while patiently awaiting the start of iris bloom season, “Alpine Lake” (Willott ’81) a miniature dwarf is always the ‘first’ bloom. In addition to being the first bloom, it is a prolific bloomer, with a light blue spot on white, and has won the top award (CW’89) for its’ class. At this writing on June 11th, we have yet to identify the ‘last’ bloom still standing as there are still many. It can be noted though, that it is the “blues” that are the late-season strong bloomers like Versailles, No Count Blues, Merchant Marine & Yaquina Blue to name a few.

We are also hosting eighteen irises for BCIS which they received from the Region 13 convention. We were concerned about the survival rate with some of the rhizomes looking particularly sad after their long journey from Oregon to get to the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia and a planting later than usual (September). Irises being irises, so resilient, we have only lost 1 out of 18 with 9/18 blooming in their first year. Appropriately named, Sunny Morning (Aitken ’18) is beautiful with its light yellow standards, white falls banded sky blue and bright orange beards. The mid to late season “Hearts Afire” (Aitken ’17) is a bright, smooth rich orange, with chocolate rims on falls and intense orange beards. It is an orange lover’s delight.

Each year we have added something new to our iris beds including reticulata “Happiness” the first to bloom in very early spring, some Siberians “Pleasures of May” with its velvety look petals, and we have just noted new blooms in one of the flower beds labelled “Spuria – a nice Hybrid” (A.McMurtrie) planted in 2017. Iris surprises are always welcome.

Enjoy exploring for next year’s blooms. The possibilities are endless.
Irises on the Shady Side - A Revelation

Penny Santosham, Okanagan
Director

For the last two decades, I’ve been confidently spreading the word through presentations at garden clubs, among friends and during tours that bearded irises need a minimum of 6 hours of direct sun for optimal bloom and increase.

This spring I’ve had to rethink this long-held belief due to the amazing display of irises in my 2-year-old, north-facing, tree-shaded, barely sun touched back garden of my Penticton home.

When I moved to this gated community in town in April 2018, I brought 30 single iris rhizomes with me ~ part of the home sale contract. When the blades were 6” tall, I dug and threw plants to my friend who was to write the names on the leaves in felt pen. Iris names don’t always make sense and some are really long so I ended up with a lot of initials and guesses: TA turned out to be Tatras Eagle, Ocean was Raging Tides, Q for Quiotic. It was an impossible task – how could anyone write Dusky Challenger on a 6-inch strip of greenery? Last spring (first year) there were single bloom stalks on 50% of the rhizomes in my perfectly oriented front garden: east-facing, sun-drenched with soil loose and richly amended. Last spring it was a wonderful relief to discover that my favourites hadn’t minded being moved at totally the wrong time of year. They flourished and this spring the display was spectacular.

The back garden was a different story. On the north side of the house, plants receive a half-hour of indirect sun in the morning and a half-hour when the sun sets in the west – filtered through a huge Linden tree. All the little bits and pieces of irises (some only 1”) with no IDs ended up there and I had little hope for their survival. Not only was there almost no sun but the soil was full of fine roots left from the hasty removal of 5 huge old columnar cedars. I dug in Walmart $2 bags of soil and sprinkled slow release 10-18-9 fertilizer in holes, planted and crossed my fingers. After the first hard freeze, all the little clumps got a handful of alfalfa pellets.

Last spring in the back bed a clump of my hybrids – cheerful, yellow selfs bloomed happily as did one stalk each of Superstition and Augustine. Nothing seemed to have died and

(Photo - Penny Santosham)
there were lots of green blades so I doused them with diluted 15-30-15 a few times during the summer.

**VOILA!** This spring there was an amazing explosion of mixed up varieties of irises that I didn’t even know I’d dug and some I hadn’t seen at my old house for several years – two being Role Reversal and Total Recall. Naples, Raspberry Swirl, For Pete’s Sake, Sultry Mood, Snow Mound, Breakers, Sea Power and Clarence are all are putting on a great show. Yesterday a first-time iris opened, like a frilly white & yellow party dress. My shady side has been a revelation!

So now the question is – **DO irises really need 6 hours of direct sun** for good bloom? Take a look at the photos and you decide.

(Photos - Penny Santosham)

**Notice to Members**

**BCIS AGM Teleconference**

7 pm, June 28

Call 1-800-356-8278 (Toll Free) Conference Code is 601633

*Please participate!*

Detailed agenda for the meeting and financial reports were sent separately to you last week. This meeting will take less than an hour and your participation is most welcome on the phone.

*Thanks for participating*

**Sunday night at 7pm!**
Dutch Irises

Richard Hebda, BC Iris Society President

We love our bearded irises, short and tall, and even our Siberians, but you may be surprised to hear that these are not the most popular of irises. The most widely sold are the Dutch bulbous irises, the ones you see in florists shops and grocery stores marketed in huge numbers around the world.

Dutch bulbous irises originate from crosses of species mainly from the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) and adjacent France and from North Africa across the Mediterranean Sea. Botanically hybrids (Iris x hollandica) they generally are considered to be the result of a cross of the Spanish iris *Iris xiphium* and *Iris tingitana* from North Africa; the cross made by the Dutch Firm Van Tubergen in the 1800s. Other species have been added to the mix over the years. This iris can be forced to flower early and hence has become very popular in the cut flower trade. The colours are bright (mainly blues and yellows), the stems are strong and the flowers hold for several days in a bouquet.

Dutch bulbous irises are also great garden plants. I saw a massive clump, certainly many decades old, growing on the east side of an old home in Victoria that must have produced hundreds of flowers every year. Yet we hardly grow them in our gardens despite the ever-increasing selection of flower colours, relatively low cost per bulb and low care.

Generally, in BC, the bulbs become available in the fall for planting which is the recommended time, although I have seen them sold in the spring for summer bloom. The plants are hardy in zones 6-9 and likely in zone 5. That means you can grow them all along the coast and the bottoms of valleys in the south including those of the Thompson, Okanagan and the Kootenay regions. They are also drought tolerant. Some sources suggest growing Dutch irises as annuals in cold climates, presumably planted in the early spring, flowering in the summer and then, I infer, lifting them in the late summer when dormant.

Bulbs produce tentative shoots in the damp late fall to mild winter weather and on the BC coast. These shoots survive the cold season to grow and flower vigorously in the spring. In colder inland climates these early shoots may not appear or will freeze off and thus set the bulb back. Strong shoot emergence holds off until early spring. Really cold deep frost climates kill the bulbs unless you protect them with straw or otherwise. Plant them 10 cm (4") deep and 10 cm (4") or more apart in the Fall in soil of average fertility and good drainage. Personally, I would avoid clay soil unless you add abundant organic matter and markedly improve the drainage. Place a good dose of bone meal in the planting hole for a slow-release food supply.

The plants grow erect into a tall leafy stem from about 50-80 cm (20-32") tall and one to several flowers open at the top of the stem and face upwards. There are no
beards in these irises, but the throat is often marked in striking yellow. Once flowers wither, the stem dies and the irises hide underground through the dry summer months. Some folks report that the plants are subject to fungal and bacterial diseases and iris borer, hence fall debris clean up is highly recommended. I have never had serious disease problems with my plants, fingers crossed.

In the case of these irises, I would plan for the long term. Choose a sunny site where you would like the clump to develop for several years. The bulbs will slowly increase by off-sets which are best left in the ground for several years to reach flowering size (about the size of your thumb). Individual flowering stalks are attractive, but clumps are stunning. Every 4-5 years you can dig up the clump from the edges and divide it, but perhaps try to leave large bulbs in a cluster in place and detach smaller offsets for planting elsewhere. As the clumps mature over the years top-dress them with rich compost or aged manure. Once the flowers pass, deadhead them or even better pick them to make gorgeous bouquets for your partner and friends. Keep the patch weeded: a couple of my plantings have declined even with a light overgrowth of grass.

The choice of varieties is modest but ever-increasing and usually only a few are available at any time. “Wedgewood” has strong bluish-purple flowers with a yellow throat and used to be the most commonly available, but I did not see it in the past couple of years. There is a white form “White Wedgewood” available. My “Wedgewood” clumps grew well in the past, but then I divided them, and they seemed to have disappeared from the garden. “Discovery” produces large bright blue flowers and grows strongly and is usually available in large sacks. I highly recommend this variety as it elicits immediate notice in the garden. “Purple Sensation” has magenta-purple blooms. “Sky Beauty” reliably produces light lavender-blue blooms.

For yellow I grow “Symphony” which combines yellow falls with white standards. The falls show a butter yellow mark. It has strong stems, modest height: I have only had it for a couple of years, and we will see how it fares in the long run. All-yellow “Golden Harvest” is another popular form.

Recently, bronzed and brownish flowers have become available, these are widely sold these days. “Eye of the Tiger” and “Lion King” fall into this category. “Eye of the Tiger” is on the brownish side whereas “Lion King” tends toward the bronze. Some folks really like these colour combinations whereas others are less enthusiastic. Personally, I like them for their variety. My blooms are not quite as bronze or brown as described, rather more purple. They do not however replace the strong blues, purples and yellows of traditional types. Late last fall I purchased “Pink Panther” which soft lilac-pink flowers at least on the packaging, these have yet to bloom. Rosario is pink suffused aster violet.

If you cannot make up your mind about what hue you might like, buy the widely available mixed bags and I am sure you will find a colour or colours that suit your tastes. Such mixes have yielded nearly pure white and butter yellow blooms for me.

Give Dutch bulbous irises a try, they may not be as flamboyant as their tall bearded cousins, but they do make a super and reliable display and are bouquet-best.
Iris Companions; Tree and Shrub Peonies

Malcolm Ho-You, edited and supplemented by Richard Hebda
Prepared from summary points of an illustrated lecture.

Cultivated peonies originate from four main species:

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<thead>
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<th>Species</th>
<th>Origin</th>
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<tr>
<td>Paeonia emodi</td>
<td>Himalaya Mountains, India</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paeonia lactiflora</td>
<td>(same as Paeonia albiflora) Central China and Siberia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paeonia lutea</td>
<td>Mountains of Yunnan in southern China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paeonia officinalis</td>
<td>Europe, south of 48 degrees latitude</td>
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Types of Peonies
Herbaceous peonies: mainly P. officinalis used for medicinal purposes in ancient times, has single and double flowers.

Tree and shrub peonies:
These have a woody stem, do not die down to the ground. They have been cultivated in China and Japan for centuries. P. x suffruticosa, is a group of woody hybrids, called “moutan” in China, and has large flowers 8-10” (20-25 cm) across. These were exported to Japan, England, France and the Americas in 17th century. P. lutea has yellow flowers and was discovered in southern China in 18th century. It is the dominant tree peony in China, called “Sho yo” meaning most beautiful. It was brought to botanical gardens at Oxford and Kew in England.

Development and Hybridization
France has the most numerous and famous hybridizers and growers of familiar herbaceous peonies. From France came varieties such as Felix Crousse, Monsieur Jules Elie, Sarah Bernhardt, Primevere, and Festiva Maxima. In the USA Karl Rosenfield hybridized in the 19th century and was then followed by many others.

Flower Form
Includes: singles, Japanese, Anemone, Semi double, Bomb, Semi-rose and Rose (fully double).

Planting and Care
- Plant in fall having prepared soil six months earlier.
- Must plant roots (crown) 2-3” (5-7.5 cm) below surface to avoid frost heaving.
- Never plant in spot where peonies grew previously, otherwise replace the soil.
- Space 2-3 feet (60-90 cm) apart and mulch for the winter. Mulch with straw or cornstalks, never use old peony leaves which carry diseases.
- Disbud and remove flowers to increase bloom production.

Fertilizing
- Manure must be at least five years old, otherwise carries wilt, rot, fungus and blight.
- Can also use green crops, bone meal, wood ash and commercial fertilizers.
- Wood ash is particularly valuable because it has caustic potash and lime which keep the soil sweet and ward off fungus.
Propagation and Planting

Peonies are increased by root division. They can be grown from seeds but never come true from parent plant. Professional growers select 2-3 year old plants for root division. Dig the roots starting in a circle several inches (12") out from the crown. Wash the dirt away with hose water and inspect for broken roots or disease and cut away. Downward pointing roots are desired. Clean the roots mass of dirt and then rinse in 10% bleach. Divide and let the root and crowns dry for 2-3 days and form a callus on all the cuts. Root orientation is strongly influenced by soil in which they are grown, so that sandy and loose soil is preferred. Plant herbaceous peonies so that the crown is 2” (5 cm) below the surface.

Tree peonies are grown from grafts on herbaceous peony roots. Plant tree peonies so that the graft point is 4- 6” (10-15 cm) below the ground surface. Plant tree peonies in friable, preferably sandy soil to produces straight roots.

Seed propagation: Seeds harden rapidly and take two years to germinate. Plant seeds when they just turn brown and still have green colour. Plant them in loam.

Diseases

- Many: wilt, black rot, botrytis, root gall
- Good air circulation and full sunlight destroy fungal spores and help control diseases.
- Bordeaux mixture (copper sulphate and lime) chemically controls fungus diseases (check for local regulations), also works on roses.

Caring for Peony Cut Flowers

- Wash all tools, buckets and vases with bleach to reduce flower contact with bacteria.
- Cut early in the morning while buds are cool.
- Leave at least three sets of leaves to keep stem vigorous.
- Cut in bud stage when buds feel like a large firm marshmallow.
- Place stems immediately in cool water then cut and remove stems again.
- Keep flowers out of direct sunlight and heat.
- Change water daily and add one drop of bleach each time to control bacteria.
Common Peony Choices

Herbaceous types

- **America**: flowers red, yellow centre, single (Rudolph-Klehm) APS Medal 1997
- **Buckeye Belle**: glossy dark red, yellow and red centre, semi double (Mains) APS Medal 2010

**Herbaceous types**

- **Coral Charm**: flowers coral, yellow centre, semidouble (Kissing) APS Medal 1986
- **Kansas**: flowers red, red centre, double, (Bigger) APS Medal 1951
- **Miss America**: blush pink to white, yellow centre, double (Man-Van Steen) APS Medal 1956
- **Mother's Choice**: creamy pink, double, (Glasscock) APS Medal 1993
- **Nick Shaylor**: white to pale pink, red in centre, double, (Allison) APS Medal 1972
- **Old Faithful**: bright red, yellow centre, double (Glasscock/Falk) APS Medal 1997
- **Paula Fay**: reddish pink, yellow centre, semi double, (Fay) APS Medal 1988
- **Rozella**: dark pink, orange centre, double, (Reath)
- **Sea Shell**: Bright pink, yellow centre, single to semi double, (Sass) APS Medal 1990

**Shrub and tree types**

- **Bartzella**: lemon yellow, double, Itoh (Andersen) APS Medal 2006
- **High Noon**: yellow, centre orange yellow, semi-double to double, tree (Saunders) APS Medal 1989
Richard Hebda and Ted Baker

Our HCP beds have been both rewarding and challenging since early winter. We have had some excellent displays from our plants as they take hold. Both Bearded and Siberians showed well; too bad because of the COVID 19 closure of the HCP to visitors few people were able to enjoy them. However, the HCP staff and garden volunteers loved the colour in our beds and made sure they told us how much they appreciated the display. We include a few images for members to enjoy. Our companion plants showed off too especially the early hellebores and then peonies and clematis.

The HCP established a schedule for volunteers in their gardens to maintain social distancing and controlled entry to the beds. We were welcomed at 11:00 am on Tuesdays usually by Deborah Donahue the Garden Manager. We kept the beds absolutely (almost) weed-free and were apparently the envy of the other volunteers as they too did a great job in their respective gardens. Self-sown verbena (*Verbena bonariensis*) and annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*) seem, at the moment, to be the main problems. There is also an invasive onion in a part of the beds, but we have knocked it back pretty well. Diane Whitehead donated and planted five Pacific Coast irises which found a home under the edge of the apple trees. All our additions of last year seem to have established, some better than others.

And now for the challenges...

Bacterial rhizome rot has taken hold of part of the bed that experiences surface sheet flow in winter. There were some signs of this last winter, but this
warm and wet late winter and the cool and wet early springs have killed off at least half of the bearded clumps. I (Richard H.) cut back the diseased rhizomes and treated with powdered sulphur but could not stop the advance as the rhizomes went to mush and the fans fell (see image). Better drained parts of the bed were less severely hit but even then, there were losses.

We (Ted and I) will be working with the HCP staff to build raised beds and improve drainage in advance of the next planting season which is coming soon. We may need a volunteer work party for this activity. We will be in contact.

I would like to end with a thank you to Ian Efford who donated several irises that are growing in the HCP beds, with two more in reserve there in the greenhouse. These will be planted soon in reverence and remembrance of a wonderful BCIS member and tremendous iris grower.

Take a nice online break and enjoy the following Virtual Garden Tours during the COVID pandemic - click on the links below.

- **Schreiner’s Iris Garden**  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKsyPHiK3Vg
  A short visit to this Oregon Landmark - the largest Iris Producer in the world
- **Goodman Iris Garden**  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3ATOJV3Ts
  A one hour visit to this extensive iris garden
- **Monet’s Garden**  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjWx2WNXFF4
  A quick visit to this world famous French garden
- **My Iris Garden**  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iIYSI5Y3ImM
  A 4 minute musical tour of Jean Kennedy’s Tall Bearded Iris Garden
- **Marsh Botanical Garden at Yale U.**  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vs28dipJ9Cw
  A quick tour of its Tall Bearded Iris Collection
- **Sissinghurst Castle Garden**  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEcoSAVhHr8
  A brief tour of the Sissinghurst Castle Garden Irises
**BC Iris Society Financial Statements**  
*January 1 to December 31, 2019*

### Total Deposits – ISCU – Jan 1, 2019

**REGULAR CHEQUING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>US $</th>
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### Expenditures

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<td>BC Coun. Garden Clubs Insr+Fees</td>
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### Revenue

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**Closing Balance = 3717.60**
**BUSINESS ACCOUNT**

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**US DOLLAR ACCOUNT**

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<tr>
<td>Closing Balance</td>
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Closed account and transferred CAD$409.11 to chequing

**TERM DEPOSIT**

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Transferred $3298.47 to chequing from original $18045.83 TD + $244.43 int

**MEMBERSHIP SHARES**

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**Total Deposits – ISCU – Dec 31, 2019**

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W. Dumont, Treasurer, 250-743-9882

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**Join the BCIS**

Our membership year is the same as the calendar year. Dues are $15 for individuals and $16 for families and societies. **Members are encouraged to pay three years to simplify the renewal process ($45 or $48 for 3 years).**

Please mail the following information and your cheque (payable to BCIS) to **Diane Whitehead - BCIS, 5088 Clutesi St., Victoria, B.C. V8Y 1X4**

Name(s)
Mailing address
Telephone number
Email address
Amount Paid
Peonies and Irises - A Photo Essay

Text and photos by Ted Baker, past President BCIS

2020 British Columbia Iris Society

Peonies

Peonies are just so wonderful. They are stunning and give pleasure for generations.

Peonies should be divided in the fall. After selecting the plant you want in your garden, be sure to prepare your site well. The site should have at least 6 hours of sun and be well-drained. Your peony can grow in place for 80 years, so make sure trees and shrubs will not grow and shade it over time. Dig deep and wide and add compost and bone meal to the hole. Because you have loosened the soil, it will leave a mound, which is good because as it settles the peony will end up at ground level. Plant your peony so the growing eye is from one to two inches deep, not deeper, and with the tuber lying horizontally just below the soil surface. Water in and keep moist but not wet until winter rains come.

Give a light feed of a balanced, slow-release fertilizer in the spring. When cutting flowers for indoors, do it in the early morning and be sure to leave at least three leaves on the plant to ensure it blooms next year.

Peonies come in three types plus species, and in a good range of colours.

**Herbaceous Peonies** are cut back in the fall. They come mainly in reds, pinks and white, but new colours are being introduced over time. See Pastelegance which is a lovely champagne. Most of the doubles will need staking.

**Tree Peonies** grow woody stems and are not cut back. They grow tall, and a mature plant can have over 50 blooms in one season. So lovely in a situation where you have afternoon shade which helps to hold the colour.

**Itoh or Intersectional Peonies** are a cross between herbaceous and tree peonies. The result is a plant that has the beautiful cut leaves of a tree peony and also many colours not found in a herbaceous peony, including yellows. They do not need staking, which is another advantage. These can be expensive, as they are relatively new introductions, but so worth having in your garden.

**Peony Species**

There are about 35 recognized

**Pastelegance** - Herbaceous Peonies

**Red Charm** - Herbaceous Peonies

**Tree Peonies**

**Bartzella** - Itoh Peonies

**First Arrival** - Itoh Peony
peony species. These are native to Asia, Europe and Western North America. Most of the peonies in commerce are hybrids of these species or hybrid crosses. One of the species that most of us are familiar with is *Paeonia mlokosewitschii*, or “Molly The Witch” as most of us know it.

**Irises**

Irises come in many types and colours, hence the name the Rainbow flower. Planting varies depending on type and will be discussed with each type.

**Bearded Irises** are divided into classes by size, season of bloom and form. For our purposes, they will be discussed as Tall Bearded and the smaller types. They are best transplanted about a month after they bloom. They tend to go dormant at this time and start to grow again when moved. Plant them in well-drained, rich soil which gets at least 6 hours of sun. Water in well and keep moist until fall rains come. Once established, minimal water is required.

To keep clumps from losing vigour and, therefore, bloom, thin the clumps by taking out some of the old rhizomes [use a dandelion tool or screwdriver to pop them out]. Lime the clumps and fertilize with a balanced, slow-release fertilizer as they start to grow in the spring.

**Tall Bearded** [TB] irises are the most popular and grow in many Salt Spring gardens. Many of the ones we see are Historics, meaning they were introduced over 30 years ago. They are 70 cm [27.5 in] tall and over.

**Smaller types** [Standard Dwarf, Intermediate, Border and Miniature Tall Bearded] are up to 70 cm tall and are planted and cared for the same as the TB irises.
The Siberian palette including pinks, tans and reds, and wonderful patterns. They are easy to grow and are almost disease-free. Once a clump is established they are very drought tolerant. When Burgoyne Bay Provincial Park was established years ago, the houses in the Bay were moved out. One had three established clumps of Siberians, and they continue to bloom beautifully with no attention, including irrigation.

They are best transplanted in early spring, just after they have finished blooming, or in the early fall. Plant in a well-drained, rich site, about one-and-a-half inches deep. Water in well and keep moist the first year. Fertilize in the spring with a balanced, slow-release fertilizer. After bloom is finished, cut or pull off the stalk at the base. Cut the foliage down to about 4 inches in the fall.

Spuria are the irises that florists like best. Like peonies, they can be cut and placed in cold storage until they are needed. They are tall and elegant in the garden. They bloom in mid-June in a good range of colours including blue, purple, yellow, white, tan, wine and bi-colours. They transplant best in early spring. Plant about 2 inches deep in well-drained, rich soil. They can be mulched to conserve moisture and help with the weeding.

If you do not have enough water you can stop watering in the summer and they will go dormant and the leaves will die back. If you chose to do this, don't water them once they are dormant or the rhizomes will rot. When the fall rains come new growth will appear.
Japanese irises are considered the Queens of the irises. And true, they are particularly elegant. They come with three, six and nine or more falls, a range of colours including white, pinks, blues, purples and many shades in between. They also boast many patterns, but where they shine is the size of the flowers, that can be 8 inches across. The blooms sit atop tall, stiff stems.

Of all the irises they respond to good care and will give ample rewards if heavily fertilized with nitrogen and kept well-watered. A good time to transplant is just after they have finished blooming and should be planted 10 to 12 cm deep. This is because, unlike other irises, they root up the stem so eventually the roots reach the top and vigour is compromised and the iris must be replanted.

There are nearly 300 species of irises which are native to the Northern Hemisphere. They are a wonderful addition to any garden. Species and Species Crosses have been included here.

There are 11 Pacific Coast irises species that range from northern California to mid-Washington. There were probably some in British Columbia before the last ice age. They do cross in nature and have been hybridized extensively to give a wonderful range of form, colour and patterns.
Richard Hebda, President BC Iris Society

I really like the smaller bearded irises in particular because they stand up to the strong winds we get blasting our Saanich Peninsula valley with spring showers and weather systems. These winds and heavy rain often topple my tall bearded beauties.

Two years ago the BCIS undertook a group order from Aitken’s Salmon Creek Garden in Oregon. Using the images on-line and the descriptions I put in my order for non-tall bearded varieties; colour and indications of strong increase were my two main criteria. Among the 15 or so choices two have been real successes, small dwarf bearded (SDB) Gold Reward and intermediate bearded (IB) “Lakota”. Both increase moderately, have stunning blooms and handle wind with style.

Success With Two Strong Non-Tall Bearded (NTB) Beauties: Gold Reward and Lakota

Gold Reward (SDB) was introduced by J. Terry Aitken 2015 and registered in 2016. It is described as growing 25 cm (10”) tall well within the SDB limits of 40 cm. However, my plants grow to 35 cm tall, a good feature because they are consequently especially showy. Noted as a mid to late bloomer, my slightly shaded patch flowered for more than three weeks from mid-April to early May this year making it in comparison to other SDBs a mid-season bloomer. The flowers have strong stunning gold standards and falls of medium size. The delight is an inky blue beard that contrasts cheerily with the petals; I have never seen anything like it. Even on a dreary cloudy day, this combination brought a smile; one could not help but be joyful. Even though planted in a partly shaded and somewhat cool site, my patch has increased well in the two years since I planted it and I will make a couple of divisions from it this year. Terry Aitken what a wonderful treasure you have given us.
Lakota is an Intermediate Bearded iris registered in 2013 and introduced in 2014. Hybridized by Marky Smith it is described as growing to about 60 cm (24") well within the range of the IB category of 40 – 69 cm (16 - 27.5") tall. In my sunny site, Lakota grows only 40-45 cm (16-20") tall slightly more than some neighbouring SDB's and in the lower part of the IB range. Its blooming overlaps with late SDB's and MTB's, appearing just before and along with early TB's.

The colour of this iris immediately attracts one's gaze, drawing forth comments of wonder. Classified as having a ruffled plicata iris colour pattern, the actual hues are difficult to describe. Officially they include copper brown, lavender, peach and violet. The full description in the National (US) Gardening Association's Plants Database is as follows “Grey orange petal edges on standards, centers and rib lavender, greyer tan; petal rims on falls grey orange, upper fall and shoulders darker smoke orange, fine veins flaring from beard, lower half of center violet, grey orange veining ending in orange rim.” Oh my goodness! The beards are supposed to be a greyed red-orange.

The use of “grey” and “smoke” elicits a mental concept of drabness... There is nothing drab about Lakota, and I surely see no grey. Frankly, the colours of the bloom are beyond description except perhaps for “wow” and “wonderful”.

The plant grows strongly produces many blooms often in masses and increases moderately. It received an Honourable Mention in the IB category at the American Iris Society convention in 2016.

Another winner as far as I am concerned in the Non-tall bearded category.

Are you following us on Facebook?
We add news about plant sales, garden tours, special iris talks, etc., plus photos and information about irises to our page, so be sure to like us at:

britishcolumbiairissociety

Be sure to check out our website as well where you'll find upcoming events, newsletters, and our photo gallery full of beautiful iris photos:

bcirissociety.com

This newsletter was produced by Bill Dumont with graphic design by Raielene Langdon of Blue Pixel Design. Thanks to all who contributed articles, photos and other information. Please send contributions for our next newsletter in Winter 2020 to wedumont@hotmail.com.