

The British Columbia Iris Society [BCIS] January 03, 2006

Over the years some individuals have thought about starting an iris group in BC but as with many things it just never made it off the ground. But as I had some extra time last fall I thought it was time to get something going. There is a lot of knowledgeable iris people here but some of us are getting older and I thought we needed to have a mechanism to pass that information on. I have sold iris from our place for about 12 years: mostly by word of mouth and mostly on Salt Spring Island where Sonja and I have lived for 30 years [Salt Spring Island is located between Vancouver and Victoria in the Strait of Georgia]. So I think that Salt Spring probably has the largest ratio of irises to humans of any place in Canada!

I started calling people last September who I knew liked plants and irises in particular or had bought irises from us. I also asked everyone I contacted to let me know of people who they thought might be interested in an iris group and if they would put a notice in their local Garden Club Newsletter. By mid October we had 16 interested people, by November, 40 plus, and now we have 65 members/families. The fortunate part is that Harry Hill, a member from north of Vancouver on the Sunshine Coast, said he would set up a website [[bc-iris.org](http://bc-iris.org)] for us. This gave us an excellent tool to make contact with people and distribute information. While we have much work to do on the website it should be fully functional by March.

We have also been very fortunate to have Marshall Soules join the group. He is a relatively new gardener and loves irises. But even more important to BCIS he is the Head of the Media Department at a University College on Vancouver Island and is our Director of Media and Public Relations. He will be developing the format and producing an electronic Newsletter that can be printed for those who do not have internet access. Our first Newsletter will be ready by mid February.

We have members across BC and our biggest challenge is to be relevant to this very scattered group of people. To do this we will rely heavily on the website, newsletters and member involvement. For example one of our Directors is Penny Santosham who lives in the Okanagan and is responsible for promotion and coordination in that area. She has developed short and long term goals. This year she will 'flood' the Okanagan with information about BCIS. She will then work to develop groups in the north, mid and southern parts which will function as satellites of BCIS. We will work to have this happen all over the Province. Also, we are planning events to give member the opportunity to learn, have access to seeds and plants, to meet people and to have fun. For example we have three garden tours planned in various locations so members can meet each other and learn about irises. We are also discussing a mentoring program where knowledgeable people will be made aware of new growers and will make sure they have sufficient attention to be successful. Only time will tell if we have reached our goals.

We have been most fortunate to have members who are 'dedicated to BCIS and others who have been really supportive. For example Kate Brewitt who is the Secretary of the Canadian Iris Society [CIS] has given us exceptional support by promoting BCIS and providing us with suggestions and information. Terry Aitkin and Bruce Filardi of Region 13 have been very encouraging and Will Plotner of GPIS and Bill McLoy of KCIS have both extended us a warm welcome and an invitation to join them in some of their events.

At the present time about 45% of the members live on Salt Spring Island where gardening is a passion. Currently the Executive are from here except for the three Directors mentioned above. However, over time as BCIS membership increases I anticipate that the bulk of the members will be in the Lower Mainland [Greater Vancouver and the Fraser Valley] with the leadership shifting to there. Also, if we do our job well there will be many semi independent iris groups scattered across BC and the function of BCIS will shift to a coordinating role.

The next few years will be exciting and we are all looking forward to many great times together, We would very much like to hear from anyone who has suggestions which would help us along. Of course we invite anyone who is interested to join BCIS or to come to our events.



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2006



### **Garden tours, 2006**

Welcome to the first B.C. Iris Society garden tour or, to be precise, set of *three* tours. The first tour, on May 17<sup>th</sup> encompasses the Comox/Courtney area; it includes four private gardens and the option of visiting a private, pay-to-view woodland garden. The second tour, on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, includes five private gardens on Salt Spring Island. The third, on June 10<sup>th</sup>, will include two private gardens and the Minter gardens, all in the Chilliwack area.

On the reverse side of the tour maps are short descriptions of each garden and information needed to proceed on the tour. The gardens on each tour are listed in the order in which we will visit them. We will meet at the first garden at a designated time and proceed as a group. Car pool where possible and bring a bag lunch so that we can eat in one of the gardens.

We would like to thank everyone who opened their garden for viewing, as well as Catherine Griffiths, expert cartographer, who produced the tour maps.

We hope for warm, sunny weather and a good turnout for our first BCIS garden tour(s).

### **Other items of business**

1. Receipts for paid BCIS membership dues are included herewith.
2. BCIS will have an iris sale at the end of July to help sustain our bank account. Several members have offered to donate rhizomes. Available varieties will be listed on our website ([bc\\_iris.org](http://bc_iris.org)) all at \$3.00 each, plus shipping. People without internet access may phone Ted Baker at 250-653-4430, towards the end of July. Anyone else wishing to donate irises, please contact Ted at the phone number above, or email to [tedebaker@canada.com](mailto:tedebaker@canada.com). If you are unsure of the variety, a short description will do. For example, *Old-fashioned, tall bearded iris that grew prolifically in my mother's garden; yellow with dark splotches on the falls; fragrant.*
3. Also, the Canadian Iris Society has a 'silent auction' of iris rhizomes. To obtain information on this, visit our website ([bc\\_iris.org](http://bc_iris.org)) and click on [Canadian Iris Society](#).
4. Another vendor has been added to our website marketplace: Ali van Klei, Cross Wind Gardens, 11368 Edmonston Road, Chilliwack, BC, V2P 1Z7, tel. 604-794-7253, email [aklei@telus.net](mailto:aklei@telus.net).



## BCIS Garden Tours 2006

### 1 - Courtney/Comox, May 17th

The tour will begin at Joan Walsh's garden at 10:30 AM. Travel time to Joan's Garden from Duncan is approximately 1.5 hours. If you are travelling from Victoria, add another hour. People leaving from Salt Spring Island should catch the 8 AM Vesuvius sailing. We will have lunch at Lynne Powell's garden.

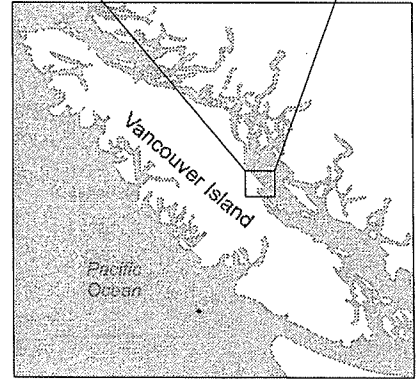
For more information, contact Ted Baker, 250-653-4430, [tedebaker@canada.com](mailto:tedebaker@canada.com), or Lynn Powell, 250-336-2077

#### The Gardens:

1. Joan Walsh, 201 Spindrift Road. Joan and her husband moved here from northern Manitoba 16 years ago. She has a wonderful collection of plants and over the years has pushed the Zone 8 hardiness limits to include many plants that are not usually seen in coastal gardens. She also has a very good collection of peonies. Not included on the map is the information that you may turn from the Inland Island Highway (19) at the Buckley Bay Road turnoff to the old Island Highway (19A) and pass through Union Bay to find Spindrift Road. Parking on Spindrift.
2. Derek and Sally Gardener, 3854 Royston Road. Derek and Sally have created a charming garden which features a pond, with a creative fountain and pleasant perennial beds. There are also berry, fruit and vegetable areas. Adding much to the overall setting are the 12 laying hens. Siberians and bearded irises are planted in the perennial border. Some parking in the yard.
3. Lynne Powell, 3360 Royston Road. The first impression here is of the sweeping lawn, interrupted by islands and borders of perennials. Featured in these perennial plantings are bearded irises, including Medians and Talls. There is also a collection of Siberians. Parking in the yard. (We will eat our lunches here.)
4. Shirley Ross, 1787 McLaughlin Drive. (Return back through Royston and turn left on 19A. Proceed through Courtney and turn right on Dingwall, which is at St Andrews Church. Proceed up Dingwall and turn right on McLaughlin.) Shirley moved here from Calgary four years ago and finds gardening on the coast interesting. She has created a peaceful setting on a city lot, with perennial borders featuring Siberian, bearded and Dutch irises and *I. cristata*.
5. Kitty Coleman Woodland Garden, 6183 Whittaker Road. (Go north about 15 minutes, turn right on Coleman Road and follow the signs.) This is a private garden open to the public year round. The cost is \$6.00 for adults. The over 3,500 Rhododendrons in the 24-acre woodland setting should be near or at their best bloom. There are also many water features in this garden.

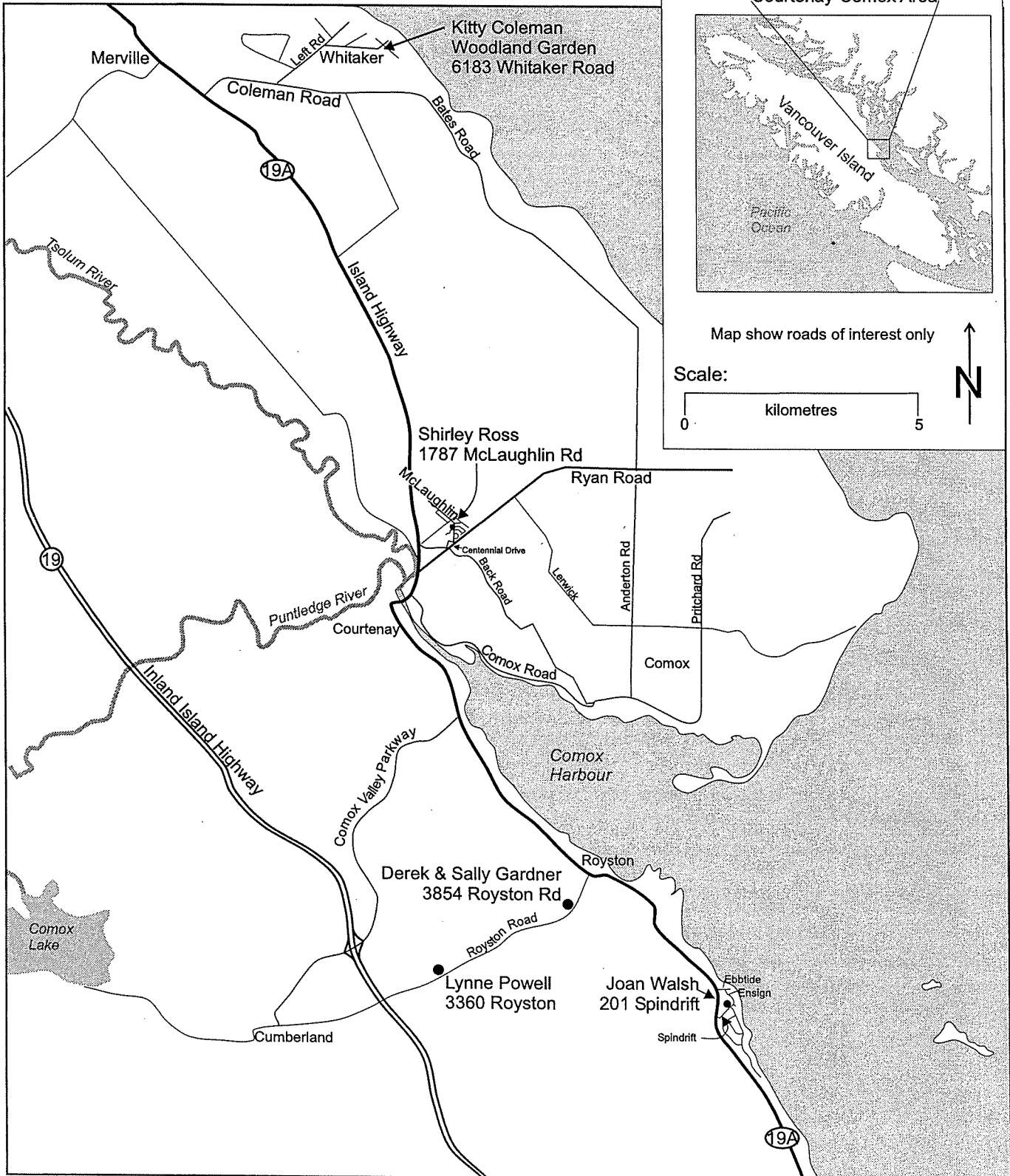
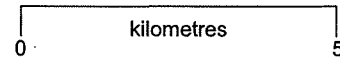
Iris Society  
Courtenay-Comox Area  
Garden Locations

Courtenay-Comox Area



Map show roads of interest only

Scale:



## BCIS Garden Tours 2006

### 2 - Salt Spring Island, June 3<sup>rd</sup>

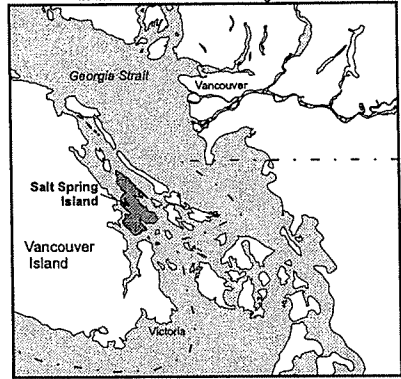
This tour will begin at May Henderson's garden at 10:00 AM, and then move to Barb Archer's garden where we will have lunch. Barb has kindly offered to provide coffee, but remember to bring your bag lunch. Anyone from off-island who wishes to leave their vehicle and be picked up from a ferry terminal, please phone ahead to make arrangements: Pat Parkes at 250-653-4917 or Ted Baker at 250-653-4430. Alternatively, email [tedebaker@canada.com](mailto:tedebaker@canada.com)

#### The Gardens:

1. May Henderson, 854 Rainbow Road. Sweeping down to Booth Canal, this garden was built around the idea of a garden 'vista'. Relaxed and spacious, it includes vegetable gardens, berries, fruit trees, a basketry-willow path, and mixed borders and shrubbery, incorporating native plants. There is also a greenhouse, rock work and unique cedar and driftwood gates and fences. There is only room at the house for parking four cars, so please park on Rainbow Road and walk in (unless handicapped, the driveway is fairly long). May's property is just before Layard Road.
2. Barb Archer, 291 Churchill Road. The garden of Barb Archer and Rob Oliver was a large, southwest-facing lawn and driveway which has now been nature-scaped with shrubs and perennials to create a habitat for birds. (We stop here for lunch and coffee.)
3. Ray and Pat Spiers, 431 Sky Valley Road. This well-tended garden contains a fine selection of plants, with some stone work, ponds and sculpture. Roses will be in bloom.
4. Ted Baker, 185 Furness Road. Ted's garden is well known for its established rhododendrons and peonies, and a huge collection of irises. The peonies, tall bearded and Siberian irises should be in bloom on tour day
5. Elaine Potter, 144 Andrew Place. Elaine describes her garden as a 'happy accident', as many of the plants were gifts from friends and relatives. Irises, daylilies, roses and a good selection of perennials blend harmoniously into a peaceful setting surrounded by native vegetation.

# Iris Society Salt Spring Island Garden Locations

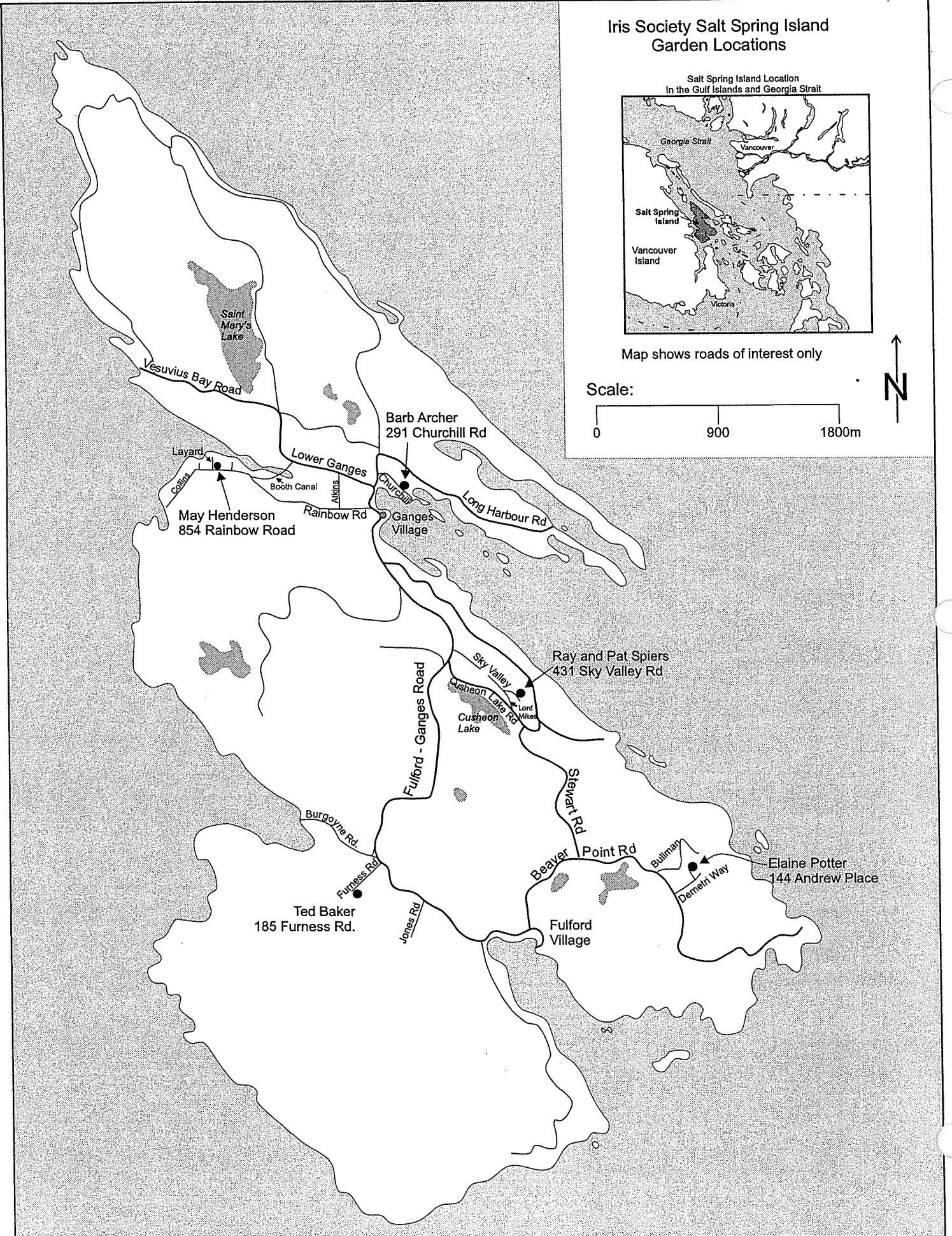
Salt Spring Island Location  
In the Gulf Islands and Georgia Strait



Map shows roads of interest only

Scale:

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BCIS Garden Tours 2006

**3 - Chilliwack, June 10<sup>th</sup>**

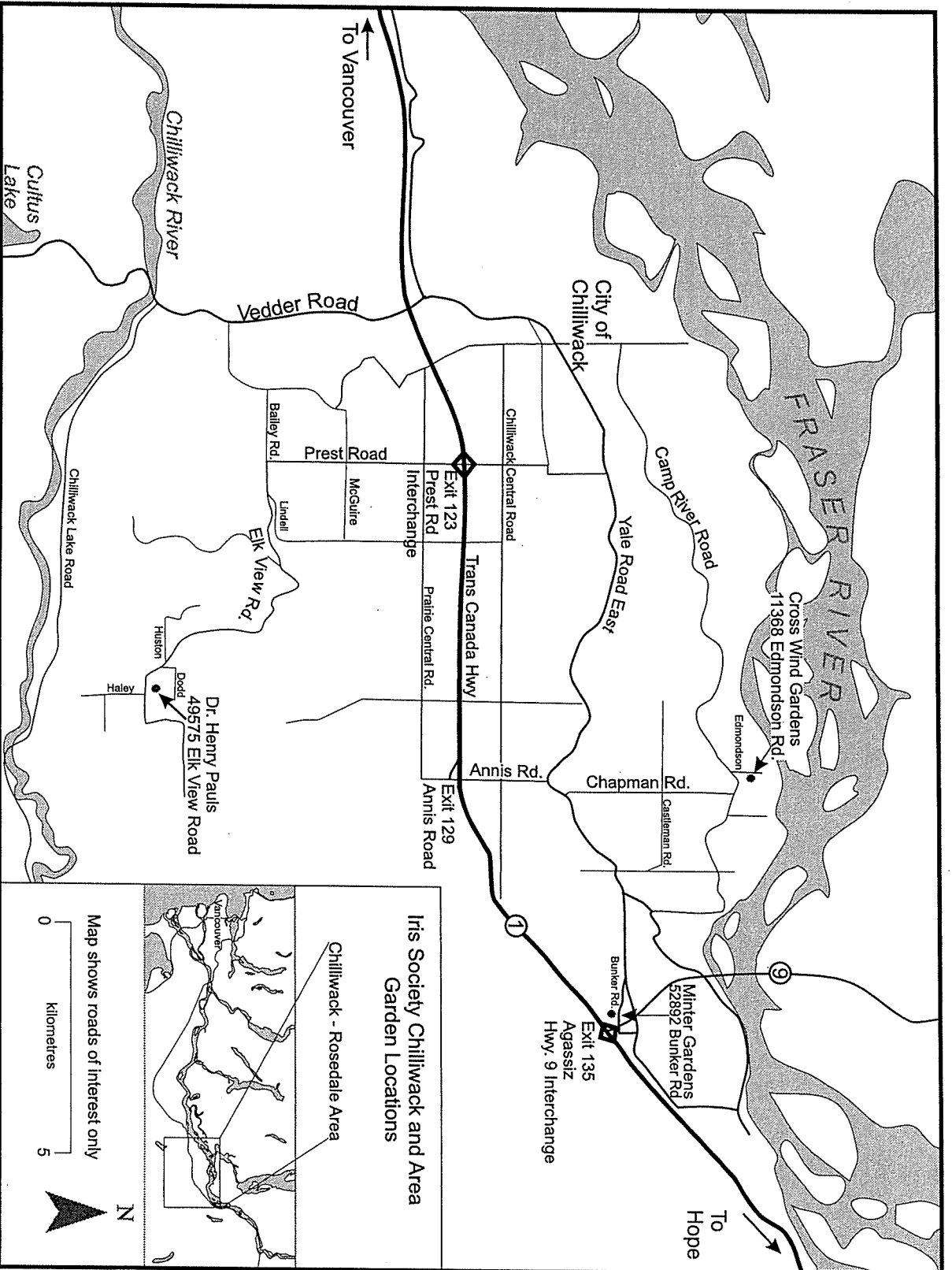
This tour will begin at 11:00 AM. at Woodside, the garden of Henry Pauls.

Anyone from Salt Spring who wishes to car pool, please contact Ted Baker (653-4430 or [tedebaker@canada.com](mailto:tedebaker@canada.com)) or Pat Parkes (653-4917). We will be catching the 6:30 AM ferry from Long Harbour. Mainland residents wanting information may phone Henry Pauls at 604-858-9549.

We will receive a reduced rate at Minter Gardens if we enter as a group of 15 or more, so please *anyone* wishing to attend this part of our tour please contact either Ted or Pat. The reduced cost is \$10.50 per person. Please bring a bag lunch and join us for a picnic at Minter Gardens.

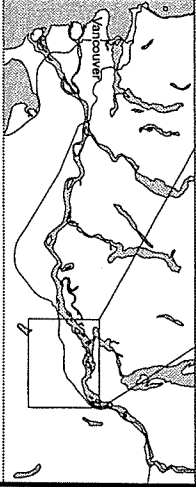
The Gardens:

1. Woodside, Henry Pauls, 49575 Elk View Road. Henry has a large acreage of second-growth forest with indigenous plants and year-round creek. The cultivated areas include an arboretum, fruit trees, vegetable garden and rows of perennials, with more than 350 varieties of Siberian irises. Potted irises for sale.
2. Minter Gardens. A thirty-two acre show garden nestled against 7000-ft Mt Cheam. Eleven theme gardens display artistic floral designs. Two restaurants (if you prefer this to a bag lunch) and a gift and plant shop.
3. Cross Wind Gardens, Ali van Klei, 11368 Edmonson Road. The two acres of gardens are home to 300+ varieties of Siberian, bearded and Japanese irises and other collections of perennials. Sales of irises from the garden.



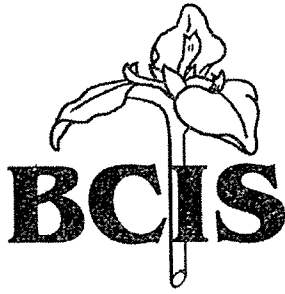
**Iris Society Chilliwack and Area Garden Locations**

Chilliwack - Rosedale Area



Map shows roads of interest only  
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# BC Iris Society Newsletter

*'Iris, the flower for all seasons'*

## 1.1 Spring 2006

### BCIS Notices: Spring 2006

BCIS Notices con't

#### BCIS Garden Tours

Join these garden tours to meet and visit with others who love irises, both new introductions and old favourites. These tours are opportunities to learn about plants, make new friends, and have fun! There is no cost for these tours but if you are not a member of BCIS, please register with one of the appropriate contacts, who will be able to provide more details about each tour.

#### 1. Vancouver Island Tour in Courtney / Comox area.

*Wednesday, May 17th.*

We are planning to see three or four gardens. Of interest will be later Spring flowers with some Standard Dwarf and Intermediate Bearded Iris. Contact Lynn Powell (250-336-2077) or Ted Baker (250-653-4430).

#### 2. Salt Spring Island Tour.

*Saturday, June 3rd.*

We will be touring four or five gardens. In early June the Tall and Border Bearded iris should still be at peak bloom plus some Siberians should be blooming. Contact Pat Parkes (250-653-4917) or Ted Baker.

#### Lower Mainland Tour in Chilliwack area.

*Saturday, June 10th.*

Plans are being made to tour two gardens with a visit and lunch at Minter's Gardens. Siberians will be in bloom at the gardens we visit and both have an extensive collection of these wonderful plants. Plan now to be on this tour and visit with others who love Siberians. Contact Henry Pauls (604-858-9549) or Ted Baker.

#### Selling Irises?

Members who sell irises and want to have their gardens listed with BCIS need to send in the following information to Ted Baker:

- Name of Garden
- Owners/Operators name(s)
- Address, phone number, e-mail and website (if available)
- Dates open for business
- Catalogue or price list?

#### BCIS Member Information Questionnaire

To be more effective as an organization and to have better member involvement we are asking everyone to complete and send in the questionnaire at the end of this newsletter. We'd like to make sure that every one who wants to get involved has an opportunity and that the expertise within our membership is used effectively.

#### Membership Fees

It is now time to pay your membership fees if you have not already done so. Fees are \$15.00 and will cover 2006 and 2007 until May. Please make cheques payable to Barb Aust (111 Salt Spring Way, Salt Spring Island, BC V8K 2G3) or Ted Baker (185 Furness Road, Salt Spring Island, BC V8K 1Z7).

#### BC Iris Society Website

Check the website at [www.bc-iris.org](http://www.bc-iris.org) for the history of the Society to date, feature articles, fabulous photos, and resource links. Thanks to Harry Hill of Roberts Creek for all his work on this important resource.

## BCIS Organizational Meeting Minutes: 14 January 2006

Organizational Meeting con't

A meeting to establish the BC Iris Society officially was held on January 14th, 2006, at the home of Barb Archer (291 Churchill Road, Salt Spring Island, BC). Those attending the meeting were treated to a tour of Barb's garden with a wonderful showing of Hellebores, Crocus, and Mahonia among other harbingers of Spring.

### Present

Ted Baker (chair), Joyce Prothero, Dee Fitton, Harry Hill, Ray Spiers, Marshall Soules, Barb Archer, Ketty Hughes, Peggy Jacobs, Pat Page, Penny Santosham, Pat Parkes (recording).

Local members were pleased to welcome Marshall Soules from Ladysmith, Harry Hill from Roberts Creek, and Penny Santosham from Penticton.

### Selection of Officers

Ted Baker was nominated as President and Dee Fitton as Secretary, both for two years. The Vice President position is still open for anyone who would like to volunteer. Other officers: Treasurer, Barb Aust; Membership Secretaries: Pat Page for e-mail; Pat Parkes for mail out; Directors: Harry Hill (website), Marshall Soules (media and newsletter), Penny Santosham (Interior liaison), Pat Parkes, Pat Page, Ray Spiers (tasks as required).

### AGM

It was agreed that the AGM coincide with a garden function during iris season and that other business be conducted at three separate executive meetings. The AGM could rotate between Salt Spring Island, Vancouver Island, Lower Mainland, and the Interior.

### Memberships

Membership dues are \$15.00/yr and will cover the period from January 2006 until May 2007. Dues paid in 2005 will also apply to this period. Membership application forms will be on the website or mailed out. Membership cards will be issued in place of receipts and can be used for discounts at nurseries and garden shows. Pat Parkes will create the template for a membership card. The Executive will contact nurseries and garden shows to arrange discounts.

Organizational Meeting con't

### Treasurer's Report

A BCIS account has been set up at the Island Savings Credit Union with Barb Aust, Pat Page and Ted Baker as signing authorities. Current revenues total \$420.00 from membership dues. Expenses include \$42.50 for website, \$5.00 for Credit Union membership, and stamps, leaving a balance of \$360.00.

### Communications

Harry Hill has created a website which has been running for three months at [www.bc-iris.org](http://www.bc-iris.org). Harry will install a counter to monitor visitors to the site. Anyone photographing events of interest to BCIS members (meetings, tours etc.) should send photos for inclusion on the website. Pat Parkes, Marshall Soules, and Ted Baker will design a home page and send it to Harry Hill. Marshall Soules and Harry Hill will propose a system whereby members can communicate about iris topics through the website.

Marshall Soules presented a prototype for an electronic newsletter in html format to be linked from the website and emailed as appropriate. Marshall will also develop a template for a print version of the newsletter to be mailed to those members who do not have internet access. Dee Fitton and Joyce Prothero will suggest topics for members to write about or discuss in future newsletters.

### Interior Liaison

Penny Santosham gave an update and her vision of BCIS activities in the Okanagan. She has prepared a poster and placed it at several locations in Penticton. She plans to "flood" the Okanagan with BCIS information during the coming year and predicts that within a few years there will be three BCIS groups representing north, mid and south Okanagan. Penny will work with local garden clubs to get the word out about BCIS.

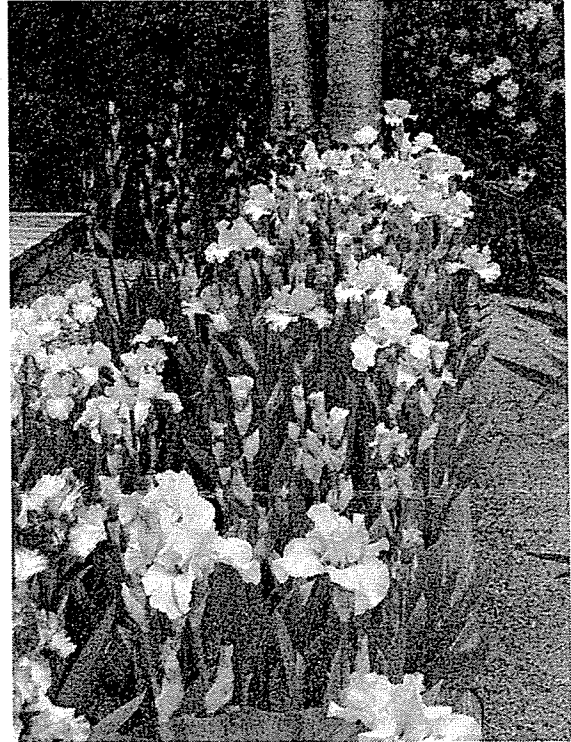
### Questionnaire

A questionnaire will be sent to all members to help build an inventory of ways for members to participate. Ted Baker will prepare the questionnaire to be sent out with the meeting minutes.

## Growing Different Types of Bearded Iris

Ted Baker

As well as coming in all colours except fire engine red, bearded iris also come in all sizes - from the Dwarfs, which can be as short as 10 cm (4 inches), to the Talls, which can grow to over 105 cm (42 inches). They also bloom at different times during April, May and June in BC.



**Border Bearded Iris.**  
Image © Ted Baker

To make sense of the different heights, conformation, and bloom times, Bearded iris have been divided into various types. This allows gardeners to select the type that will best suit their needs. The following is a brief description of the types.

**Miniature Dwarf Bearded [MDB]** are up to 20 cm (8 inches) tall. These little ones bloom the earliest and are great for the alpine or rock garden, or front of the border. But remember, they are small and can easily be overgrown by other plants, including weeds. They usually have one or two blooms per stock but have a wonderful colour range and, as with other Bearded iris, most are

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Convention will be  
22nd to 27<sup>th</sup>. (For  
[irises.org](http://irises.org).)

### ected Iris Links

[n-iris.ca/](http://n-iris.ca/)

[ses.org/](http://ses.org/)

13 (Oregon,  
[ion13-iris.com/](http://ion13-iris.com/)

[hirissociety.org.uk/](http://hirissociety.org.uk/)

ty:

Society for Japanese Irises: [www.socsib.org/](http://www.socsib.org/)

Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris:  
[www.pacificcoastiris.org/](http://www.pacificcoastiris.org/)

Species Iris Group of North American (SIGNA):  
[www.signa.org/](http://www.signa.org/)

**Notice:** BCIS members are invited to attend a pot luck dinner and to spend the evening visiting with George and Carla Lankow on March 02, 6:00 pm at the Bakers, 185 Furness Road, Salt Spring Island. George and Carla will be attending the 'Rounding the Rim' Rock and Alpine plant meetings in Sidney that weekend and wanted to contact members of BCIS. George is interested in Medians [Bearded Iris] and Carla is the immediate past President of SIGNA [Species Iris Group in North America]. But as George said, they grow about everything. They live in the Seattle area and are members of the King County Iris Society. This is our opportunity to make strong links with that iris society and to learn from this very knowledgeable couple. Please RSVP to Ted by February 28<sup>th</sup> if you are coming.

## Bearded Iris con't from page 3

## Bearded Iris con't

Standard Dwarf Bearded (SDB) range in size from 20 cm (8 inches) to 41 cm (15 inches). These are the next to bloom and the colour range is exceptional. They literally give you carpets of colour. The bud count is usually about three but can be higher. They make a wonderful show when mixed with early flowering bulbs. For me, they are very floriferous and disease resistant. But, as we get our share of slugs, it is important to control the slugs or the leaves and even the flowers can be damaged. A late evening walk with a flashlight and a sharp stick is good. There are also other ways to attack slugs but recently I have used Safer's Slug Bait. It will not harm wildlife or pets as the active ingredient is iron which prevents the slugs from producing slime. And you only need to sprinkle it sparingly in the infected area. The only problem I have had is the quail who think I am feeding them! Our quail love it, so I put the bait out in the evening or when the quail are visiting the neighbours.



**Standard Dwarf Bearded Iris**  
Image © Ted Baker

**Intermediate Bearded (IB)** range in size from 41 cm (15 inches) to 70 cm (28 inches). They bloom between the SDBs and the Tall Bearded iris so they help to give a wonderful continuous iris bloom in your garden. What is great about the shorter iris is that they never seem to blow over, even in the strongest winds--you do not have to worry about staking. Because of their time of bloom, general disease resistance, good colour range and sturdy plant form, the IBs are some of my favourites.



**Intermediate Bearded Iris, including Hot Fudge, AskAlma and Cee Jay**  
Image © Ted Baker

**Miniature Tall Bearded (MTB)** are similar in height to the IBs and the BBs and bloom starting with the IBs but last longer because of the higher bud count. They have thin, tough stems with branching and small flowers that cover the clump. They are often called Table Iris as they make a good cut flower. **Border Bearded (BB)** are similar in size to the IBs. BBs are also similar in many other ways to the IBs but bloom at the same time as the Tall Bearded Iris. As with the IBs, they do well near the front to midsection of the border.

**Tall Bearded (TB)** range in size from 70 cm (27 inches) and over. TBs are considered by many to be "the Queens" of the iris garden and they continue to be the most popular of the bearded irises. They are tall, stately, have large to huge flowers and demand attention. In the past, a short bloom season has been one of the main reasons people did not grow these wonderful plants, and that used to be true. I can remember my Grandmother's iris and they had about three buds per stock and in a week the bloom was finished. However, hybridizers have changed that and now many varieties boast from nine to 14 buds per stock with double and

Bearded iris con't from page 4

triple sockets. Some varieties also send up a sequence of stocks and thus prolong the bloom season. I have had some clumps show colour for a month. With rain and high winds, these tall plants can blow over; however, most of the newer varieties stand up very well. A field of TBs in full bloom is certainly a stunning sight.

So, the next time you are selecting plants for your garden, remember the range of heights and bloom times of bearded iris so you can pick the plants that best meet your needs.

### Selecting a Site and Preparing the Soil for Bearded Iris

Bearded iris are relatively easy to grow but, like all plants, certain requirements need to be met to have healthy plants that bloom well. However, if you have a system that works for you, keep using it and share it with others.

When selecting a site, two main criteria should be considered. First, the site needs to have at least six hours of sunlight each day during the growing season. This is the minimum amount of light that your iris need to produce flowers. The more sun the plants get the better. Second, the soil must be well drained. Bearded iris do not like to be in standing water. Too much wetness can cause soft rot of the rhizomes. If there is a heavy rain, some of my plants are in standing water for a short time but within a couple of hours it has drained away and this has not caused any problems. Difficult drainage can be fixed by building a raised bed or planting on a slope. However, check the soil on the slope during the wet season to make sure the site is not waterlogged to the surface. Some soils high in clay do not drain well and need to have organic matter added to improve the texture of the soil and allow the water to drain away. Other soils high in sand drain very quickly and added organic matter helps to retain moisture. Another thing that can be a concern with all perennial plants is locating them too close to trees where the tree roots rob the iris of water and nutrients.

In addition to rot, bearded iris can be subject to leaf spot. This is a fungal disease that appears as a tiny brown spot on the leaf, then enlarges as a watery ring around the spot, and as it ages the entire spot turns brown. It is not lethal but

Bearded iris con't

detracts from the appearance of the plant. The best way to deal with leaf spot is to prevent it. Start with disease-free plants. Plants bought from a reputable grower have been treated to ensure that you do not bring any disease into your garden. If you get plants from a friend or plant sale where you are unsure about how disease-free they are, then wash any soil off the roots and soak the plants in a 10% bleach solution for 15 minutes.

As with roses, it is better to have your iris scattered throughout your garden rather than confined to an iris bed. I have friends who received iris from me about 12 years ago and their plants are still disease free. You can have a recurring problem if your neighbours have diseased plants, so consider this and leave as much room as you can between your iris and theirs.



**SEASON TICKET Intermediate Bearded.**  
Image © Ted Baker

Now that you have selected where you are going to plant your iris, it is time to check the soil. I have previously mentioned the need to check the drainage and the effect of organic matter on soil structure and, subsequently, soil drainage. Lots of organic matter also helps retain and supply nutrients. Iris are heavy feeders, especially during rapid spring growth. At this time, they need an abundant and constant supply of food. I prepare a bed or a location for a clump of iris by removing and setting aside about 10 cm (four inches) of soil. I then dig in about a quarter to a third, by volume, of organic matter--anything organic that has been well aged or composted. You can also add some super phosphate at this time and lime if your soils

## Bearded Iris concluded...

Bearded iris prefer a soil pH that is just slightly acidic or about 6.8. (Our soil has a pH of about 5.7--which is quite acidic--but I have found that the iris adapt very well so I do not use lime.) Dig and mix the enriched soil to a depth of 18 inches for the Tall Bearded iris; 12 inches for the Border, Intermediate, and Miniature Tall; and about 10 inches for the Standard Dwarfs. Then place the original four inches of soil that you set aside back on top. The four inches of "poor" soil will keep the rhizomes from coming in contact with the organic matter and causing rot. Now you are ready to plant!

**Ted Baker** loves growing, showing and enjoying plants! He worked in the research branch of the Ministry of Forests for over 25 years and retired about eight years ago. He and his wife Sonja moved to their farm on Salt Spring Island in 1975 and have been growing things (plants, animals, four children) ever since. The garden is a mix of rhododendrons, other shrubs, and perennials, including roses, phlox, peonies, iris, lilies, and Michaelmas daisies (asters). They have gradually been growing more and more bearded iris in an unfenced area of the garden, as the island deer don't seem to have a taste for them. The Bakers' garden is currently an official Siberian Iris Society Display Garden.

### Siberian Iris Pat Parkes

**M**odern garden Siberians are descended from two species, *Iris sanguinea* and *Iris sibirica*. Native to eastern Russia and Asia except--for a westward extension of *Iris sibirica* into central and southern Europe--they usually grow in damp meadows and open woodland. In 1988, a third species, *Iris typhifolia* or cattail iris--named for its narrow, twisted cattail-like leaves--was added to this group (sub-series *Sibiricae*).

These species and the hybrids they have generated are hardy, robust plants, probably the most adaptable and easiest of all the irises to grow. They rapidly form clumps of grass-like foliage 2-4 feet tall, bearing erect bloom stalks flowering in May or June. ➔

## Siberian Iris con't

The flowers of the species forms are generally blue-violet or red-violet, occasionally white, with yellow or white markings on the falls. Hybridization has extended the colour range to include clear white, various yellows, red-violets near red, blues from pale blue to navy, violets and purples, and many bicolours and combinations.

Flower forms in the species are generally described as pendant. The flowers of hybrids have arched, semi-flaring, flaring or overlapped falls; some of them have ruffled or extra falls, and others, especially the newer Japanese hybrids, have six pendant falls, giving them the appearance of the revered *hanashobu* (Japanese or *ensata* iris).



Siberian Iris.  
Image © Pat Parkes

The healthiest foliage and best flower production can be achieved by growing them in moist, richly organic, slightly acidic soil. However, they will grow well in ordinary soils as long as it is not too alkaline (the pH should be less than 7.8). Very alkaline soil can be amended by tilling in agricultural sulphur at a rate of 680 grams per 8 square metres. If the soil has a high sand or clay content, large amounts of organic material should be incorporated.

Siberian irises prefer full sun, but will bloom well with a half-day of sun. In very hot, arid areas they will need some shade, as well as watering and mulching. They like to be constantly moist during spring and early summer, when they are growing ➔

## Siberian Iris con't from 6

most actively. Although they will survive summer drought conditions, they will produce more flowers the following year if they can be provided with one inch of water per week during the full growing season.

Siberian irises are grown as specimen plants in their own beds or, more commonly, in mixed perennial borders. They thrive when planted along the banks of ponds or streams as long as their crowns (where the leaves and rhizomes meet) are above water. They do not like to grow directly in water, but do tolerate brief seasonal flooding. The species form can also be interplanted with grasses and other perennials to create naturalized gardens and meadows. They are deciduous and may be mown once their foliage turns brown in the fall.

The best planting time for Siberian irises will depend on climatic conditions. In northern regions, spring planting is recommended to allow the plants to develop a good root system and not be heaved out of the ground by freezing and thawing. In southern regions, fall planting avoids subjecting seedlings and newly-divided plants to hot, dry, early summer conditions. In temperate regions, plants may be divided in either spring or fall, or they may be divided immediately after blooming--with this method, they will not miss a bloom season and the plant will establish early enough to produce good blooms in the following spring.

Unlike the bearded irises, Siberians do not experience a dormant period. When preparing divisions for transplanting, cover them with wet burlap or immerse them in a bucket of water; do not let them dry out.

To plant Siberian iris divisions, scoop out a hole wide enough to spread the roots, 25 cm (10 inches) deep. Place a trowel full of mixed compost and soil in the hole. Mound this mixture on the bottom of the hole and set the iris on top of the mound, spreading the roots down the sides of the mound. Fill the hole so that the crown is approximately 3-5 cm (1-2 inches) below the ground surface level. Water well. If the soil is very dry, fill the hole with water and allow to drain away before putting in the compost mix. If the weather is warm and sunny at the time of

## Siberian Iris concluded...

planting, invert plastic pots over the plants and leave them there for the first three to five days to prevent wilting and transplant shock. This is a very good practice, especially when setting out tender young seedlings.

Well-aged manure or compost may be applied 2 cm (an inch) thick around the plants in the spring and again after the bloom season; alternatively, granular fertilizer containing 10 percent each of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium (10-10-10) may be applied at the rate of one handful per plant. Some growers prefer to use a formula having extra phosphorus (10-35-10) to stimulate greater flower production. A compost or manure spread has the added benefit of acting as a mulch.

Their hardiness, ease of culture, and beauty of foliage and flowers continue to make Siberian irises a popular plant.

For more information, Currier McEwan's book *The Siberian Iris* is an excellent reference.



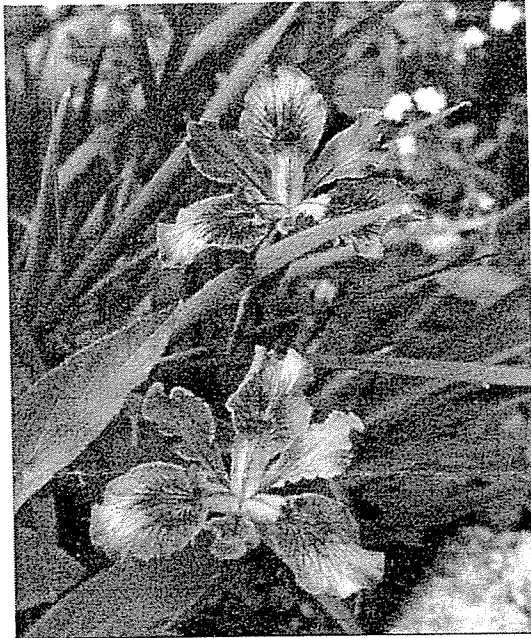
PLATE 52. *Iris tenax* (p. 25)

***Iris Tenax***

from W. R. Dykes' *Genus Iris*, 1913

## Pacific Coast Native Iris Harry Hill

You have probably heard the old expression that good things come in threes. Well, for me, nothing exemplifies this better than the flower of the iris. It's all based on threes--three falls, three standards, three style arms--and yet there is an amazing variety in colour and texture within that simple pattern.



The Iris Nicknamed 'Vonnie'  
in the author's garden.  
Image © Harry Hill

In the gardening world, the big flouncy blooms of Tall Bearded iris have long been the image that comes to mind when we think of iris. Native to open country in warmer, drier climes than the Sunshine Coast, their rhizomes invariably succumbed to rot in my winter-wet garden. The Siberian iris that I tried next were infinitely tougher and better adapted to our local conditions. More importantly, they hinted at the wide world that exists beyond Bearded iris.

While visiting the May garden of my neighbour Vonnie Kovacic about eight years ago, I noted a rather diminutive, orchid-like flower that could only be a type of iris. Vonnie said if I could guess what it was, she would give me a piece of it.

## Pacific Coast Native Iris con't

Although I had only read about them before, never actually seen one, I guessed that it might be a Pacific Coast iris. It was, and true to her word, Vonnie gave me a section of this wonderful plant, which has since thrived in my garden and been passed on to friends. It's an unnamed hybrid seedling, but I like to think of it as 'Vonnie'.

After that introduction, I began to read up on Pacific Coast iris (PCIs) and eventually obtained seed from the seed exchanges of the Alpine Garden Club of B.C. and the Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris. My enthusiasm for these iris came about partly through an interest in growing West Coast native plants--low-maintenance species that are naturally adapted to our cool, wet winters and temperate, dry summers--and partly because of their unique beauty.

Unfortunately, none of the species in the *Californicae* series of the *Iris* genus make it up as far north as B.C. (*Iris setosa* occurs in the northwest of the province, and *I. missouriensis* in the southern Interior).

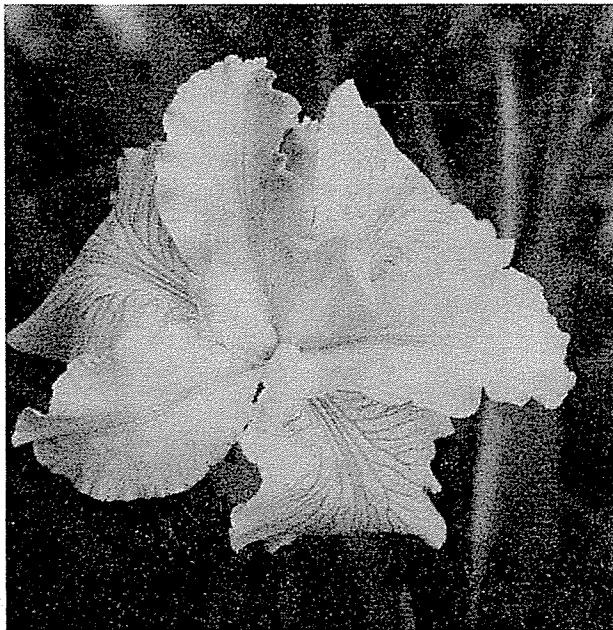


Pacific Coast iris hybrids form  
tight clumps of evergreen leaves.  
Image © Harry Hill

## Pacific Native Coast Iris cont from 8

The range of the most northerly PCI, *Iris tenax*, falls just short of Tacoma, Washington, which is only marginally warmer than the Sunshine Coast. Although *Iris tenax* might be the most cold hardy PCI, B.C. iris growers I've spoken to have all cited *I. douglasiana* as being more tolerant of the high winter rainfall and heavy soils of most coastal B.C. gardens. Only those gardening in gritty, fast draining soil thought *I. tenax* was a better choice.

*Iris douglasiana* (Douglas iris), *I. innominata* (golden iris) and *I. tenax* (Oregon iris) are the three mostly commonly grown Pacific Coast species. They are available from several native plant nurseries in the province, but not through the general nursery trade. Some B.C. gardeners have ordered named hybrids from U.S. mail order nurseries, but the unfavourable exchange rate and additional phytosanitary and shipping expenses can be discouraging, not to mention delays at Canadian customs that threaten the viability of the rhizome divisions.



A golden bloom with broad, ruffled petals.  
Image © Harry Hill

The 11 species of Pacific Coast iris cross with each other in nature, as well as in the garden. Iris breeders have been able to exploit this trait to create hybrids that combine the most desirable features of species and individual plants:

## Pacific Native Coast Iris cont

- branching stalks that carry several flowers
- broader petals and a wide colour range
- longer blooming season
- evergreen, straplike foliage
- clumping habit

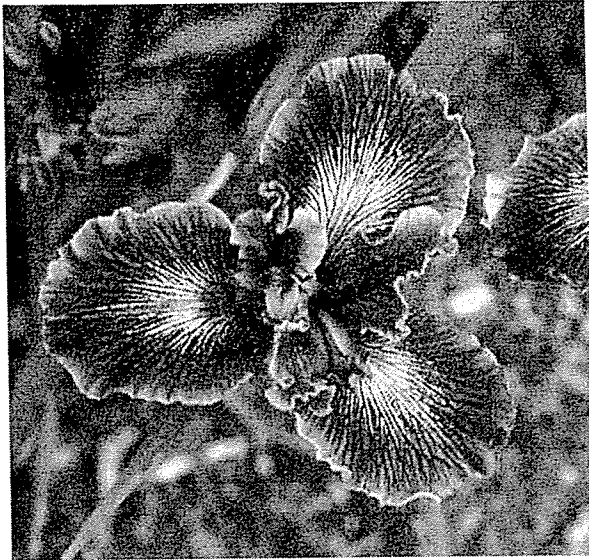
Nearly one thousand PCI varieties have been named, introduced, and registered during the past few decades. Colours are extremely variable, including reds, yellows, browns, grey, blues, purples, pinks and cream. The falls and standards are sometimes different colours, or are streaked and veined in a darker shade. Individual plants bloom for three or four weeks; on the Sunshine Coast the bloom period lasts from the last week of April to the first week of July. Hybrids can range from 15 to 50 cm in height.

In choosing a site for Pacific Coast iris, the most important factor to bear in mind is good drainage. You might want to amend your soil with sand, grit, peat, and compost to improve their root run and to facilitate drainage. In coastal B.C., PCIs seem to flower best in full sun, although they will tolerate light shade. Some watering is beneficial during our summer 'drought' period, and this is best done in early morning or evening.

PCIs resent being divided yearly; it is best to let them grow undisturbed for a few years. If you have a plant that is especially beautiful and would like to share it with a fellow gardener, carefully cut out one section of rhizomes and leave the remainder intact. Transplanting is usually done in spring or fall, when the roots are plump, white, and actively growing. I've had the best luck in early- to mid-October. Try to avoid damaging the roots and keep as much soil as possible around the sections you're transplanting. Once in the ground, they should be watered immediately and kept moist until they are well established.

PCIs eventually form broad clumps and can be quite eye-catching when in full bloom. They combine well with low growing ornamental grasses, heuchera, and pulmonaria. I also like to fill in the gaps in summer with colourful West Coast native annuals like clarkia (*Clarkia amoena* and *C. unguiculata*), Chinese houses (*Collinsia heterophylla*), and California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) by sprinkling a few seeds between the iris clumps in fall or early spring.

Pacific Native Coast Iris cont from page 9



PCI hybrids come in a wide range of colours.  
Image © Harry Hill

### Pacific Coast Iris from Seed

Pacific Coast iris have a poor survival rate when they're shipped as bare root divisions, so it's fortunate that they're very easy to start from seed. The other good news is that almost every seedling is attractive. Sow the seeds as early in fall as possible, using pots or flats filled with a peaty soil mix that is one-third sand, perlite, or chicken grit to improve drainage. Cover with about 1 cm of mix. Plant as many seeds as you can physically separate from each other when it is time to transplant them (2 to 3 cm apart). Place in a cold frame or greenhouse and keep the soil evenly moist.

The seeds will germinate in late February or March and resemble blades of grass at first. Transplant the seedlings to the garden or into pots when they reach about 10 cm tall. This will generally be May or early June. If pots are your choice, use a 4-litre (one-gallon) pot for each seedling. When planting directly into the garden, select a spot where they won't be crowded out by competing plants. I've had most success keeping them potted and protected in a cold frame over their first winter, and then planting them out the following spring when the soil warms up. Pacific Coast iris transplant well as seedlings, and will

Pacific Native Coast Iris concluded...

bloom their second or third spring. Established plants are drought and frost tolerant.

Harry Hill's enthusiasm for Pacific Coast iris is bordering on a gardening obsession--he has dozens of species and cultivars in his Roberts Creek garden, with hundreds more hybridized seedlings on the way. Harry is the Canadian representative for *Almanac*, newsletter of the Society for Pacific Coast Native Iris. ([www.pacificcoastiris.org/](http://www.pacificcoastiris.org/))

### Reducing Risk When Purchasing Irises

Ted Baker

Now is the time of year when I start thinking about buying those new varieties of iris that have made my wish list for the coming year. But where do I start?

First, I send for a selection of catalogues or price lists from reputable growers. By that I mean those who sell healthy rhizomes of good size, and who guarantee their plants to be the variety they claim they are. These criteria are all important but health is most important.



Cross Current (Tall Bearded),  
an Award of Merit Winner.

## Reducing Risk con't from 10

If you buy from someone out of Canada, you must pay the supplier to have his/her garden inspected--it will cost from \$20 to \$25 for the Phytosanitary Certificate--to ensure that your plants will be free of all pests and disease. If buying from a Canadian grower, make sure the plants are treated so all disease and pests are destroyed before you plant them. Bearded iris should be cleaned of attached soil to prevent transfer of soil-borne organisms. For plants that need to be moved with soil, I always watch to make sure the plants remain healthy and that no weed species such as horsetail have been introduced with any of the plants. If a plant does not do well and shows symptoms of disease, consider removing it from your garden.

Hundreds of irises are introduced each year so in one way it is an exciting time to see what is new. But such abundance can be overwhelming as many varieties are similar to each other or similar to older, proven varieties. Fortunately, after introduction, most varieties begin a process of evaluation by judges from the American Iris Society [AIS] for plants hybridized in the United States and Canada.

The AIS has developed a system for rating the performance of most types of iris. Two years after a variety has been introduced--and if it receives enough votes by qualified iris judges--it will be awarded an Honorable Mention [HM]. After a further two years, and again if it receives enough votes, it will receive an Award of Merit [AM]. The numbers of iris receiving these awards varies with the type of iris. The top iris from each type is then eligible to compete for the Dykes Memorial Medal given in recognition of the best iris of the year. To receive an HM, AM or the Dykes Memorial Medal, these plants have had to perform well in a range of climates and growing conditions. Also, they usually have good foliage, increase well, are disease resistant, have a better-than-average bud count, and have blooms with clean colours and very good form.

Wonderful irises are also produced in other parts of the world and many countries have developed

Photo by Ted Baker, 2005  
Reducing Risk concluded / Society Info

their own awards system for evaluating performance. So, if you see an excellent iris without an AIS award, check the country of origin as this may be the reason. Also, check the year of introduction to see if it is a new variety that has not been introduced long enough to qualify for awards.

Even after doing all this checking, there is a possibility that one or two of your new plants will not do well. This is the time to move them to a new location in your garden, and can make a difference to how they will perform. However, for the most part, the irises you have carefully selected will give you many years of enjoyment and you will be well rewarded for the extra time you have taken to make your choices.

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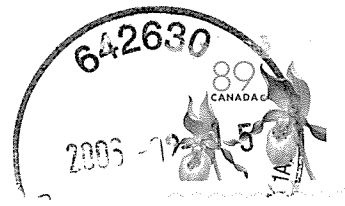
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