



Three Myths About Bearded Irises

On the subject of growing bearded irises, I have found three myths that seem to be ubiquitous, and inevitably resurface during any internet discussion of the subject. This article addresses each of these three myths, in the hope that a clear exposition of each will provide a little island of solid information that is often missing from untethered internet exchanges.

Myth #1: Bearded Irises Will Not Bloom Unless The Tops of Their Rhizomes Are Exposed to Sunlight

Although, as I shall explain in a bit, there are some good reasons for planting irises with the tops of the rhizomes exposed, it is not necessary to do so to ensure bloom. Irises bloom just fine if planted with an inch or more of soil over the rhizome. Nothing magical happens when sunlight strikes the surface of an exposed rhizome.

Where did this myth come from? I think it has three sources. The first is a very basic piece of advice: iris rhizomes are not bulbs. Most spring-flowering bulbs (daffodils, tulips, crocuses, etc.) need to be planted fairly deeply

(three times their height is a common recommendation). If you plant an iris as deep as a tulip, it may indeed not bloom. In fact it may not survive at all. The second is a general remark about growing conditions irises prefer: they like full sun, or at least half a day of sun, and will not bloom well in too much shade. Finally, there is a bit of traditional advice that irises should be planted “like a duck in the water” with the top



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Tom Waters ~ *World of Irises Blog* September 16, 2019

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Reprint :World of Irises Blog

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Moraea polystachya

FEBRUARY HAPPENINGS

PRESIDENT SHERRY'S MESSAGE

Happy New Year! Happy Valentines Day! Looking forward to see you all on February 15th for our 1st meeting of 2020. We are really excited about the coming year. Much to do to make our public and personal gardens amazing. Our new board met in January. We have a great lineup of speakers and topics for our 2020 meetings. Watch your newsletters for more information.

Hopefully, we'll have more rain this winter / spring to help us have the wonderful gardens we all work so hard to achieve. We have work to do on the irrigation system at the Yavapai Sculpture Garden. Time, weather and probably javalina have damaged some areas affecting how well everything is being watered. We will work on that as soon as the weather warms up. We are also going to remove the daylilies from the memorial gardens at Embry-Riddle. They are a bit too happy there and are overgrowing our iris, which seems to be directly opposite of our intent. We, of course, will let everyone know at the meetings when you will be able to jump in and help us with our efforts. Many hands make the job go faster and spending time with friends makes your heart grow warmer.

We had great shows last year and are looking forward to a repeat this year. We currently have approximately 1200 potted plants being well cared for by Brenda Griffin for our Spring Sale & Exhibit. We have moved our sale from Mortimer's Nursery to the Rodeo grounds this year and are really looking forward to the new location. We want to thank Mortimer's for all of their efforts and help over the last few years. Having the sale in their greenhouse has been a wonderful experience and we truly appreciate their providing it to us. However, our show caused their staff to have to remove everything from the greenhouse and



'Go West' (2011) - Roger Duncan

to clean it before the show. Plus we caused a huge parking dilemma for them. We are looking forward to our new experience being at the Rodeo Grounds in the Mackin Building this year and a BIG thanks to Brenda Griffin for jumping on this and getting us a reservation!

Our first meeting is February 15th at the Stoneridge Community Center. We are fortunate that all of our meetings and the Rhizome Sale will be back at the Stoneridge Community Center due to Loretta Bresof's efforts working with the HOA of Stoneridge. We truly love the community center and appreciate being able to use it for our PAIS meetings.

Our next board meeting will be 10am on the same day, in the kitchen, next to the community center meeting room. All members are welcome to attend, to provide your input and opinions. ~ Sherry Williams

PAIS February '20 Meeting:

February 15th,

Board Meeting: 10am

General Meeting: 1:30pm

Stoneridge Community Center

1300 Stoneridge Drive

Prescott Valley, AZ 86314

2020 Board Announcements

Speaker: Laurin Pause, Master Gardner

Subject: Composting



2020 CALENDAR & ANNOUNCEMENTS

2020 PAIS Calendar

Well, the new year is here and it is already February (see how time flies when your having fun)! We had our first board meeting early in January establishing our calendar for the year. There's some exciting stuff planned this year! Remember, all members are invited to join us at board meetings and your comments are always welcome. The board meetings are held mornings of the general meeting in the kitchen area next to the community center room where we hold regular PAIS meetings.

You will receive our first newsletter for 2020 just prior to the first meeting, which will contain more information about the scheduled meeting and subject. The following schedule does not include garden maintenance and other needs that will be scheduled on an as need basis.



- February 15** ~ Board Meeting 10:00 / General Meeting 1:30 / Stoneridge Community Center
- April 18** ~ Board Meeting 10:00 / General Meeting 1:30 / Stoneridge Community Center
- May 1** ~ Set-up for Spring Show / Mackin Bldg. - Rodeo Grounds
- May 2** ~ Spring Show & Exhibit / Mackin Bldg. - Rodeo Grounds
- June 13** ~ Board Meeting 10:00 / General Meeting 1:30 / Stoneridge Community Center
- July 18** ~ Marking Parking / Brenda Griffins Home - Chino Valley
- July 24** ~ Set-up for Rhizome Sale / Stoneridge Community Center
- July 25** ~ Rhizome Sale / Stoneridge Community Center
- September 15** ~ Board Meeting 10:00 / General Meeting 1:30 / Stoneridge Community Center
- November 14** ~ Board Meeting 10:00 / General Meeting 1:30 / Stoneridge Community Center



Nominating Committee Announcement from Loretta:

*The **Hospitality Chairman** position is open. We need someone who can help set up and take down for our 1 or 2 pot luck meetings, assist with order & pick-up of pastries and lunch for the **Iris Spring Show** and **Summer Rhizome Sale**. Set-up the ice cream social (for our general meeting). There are usually only 5 general meetings a year. Not a big job but a necessary one. (NOTE: Since I am no longer on the board but am a resident of Stoneridge, I can assist the Hospitality Chairman at that venue.)*

*Please contact **Sherry Williams**: 714-515-2160
or **Loretta Bresof**: 928-775-8701 to volunteer.*

NEW IRIS IN OUR 2020 GARDENS



New-To-Us
in Our Iris
Gardens

Kellie's
Garden:
TBs 'American Original'. 'Crimson
Snow'. 'Redneck Girl'



Marty's
Garden:
TBs 'Bewilder-
beast'.
'Marsh-
mallow'.
'Mesmerizer'

Photos for this article: PAIS members or
the internet.

PAIS Members' Iris Gardens: What's New in 2020?

By the time February comes around, we're all getting tired of winter's cold, our dormant gardens, lack of flowers (specifically, iris!) and no color. Everyone's eager for hints of spring, looking forward enthusiastically to our iris gardens. So we asked our members, what irises are you hoping to see blooming for the first time this spring in YOUR gardens?

Here are the responses we received along with photos...

Gary Miller ~ A Louisiana seedling of mine GM24LA I-4.

We all hope it does bloom, so we can see what it looks like. So exciting!

Kellie Smith ~ TBs *American Original*,
Crimson Snow, *Redneck Girl*

Marty Boxer ~ TBs *Bewilderbeest**,
Marshmallow, *Mesmerizer**

*Cynthe's hoping to see these iris bloom, too.



Loretta Bresof ~ With ambitious plans and high hopes, Loretta has 23 iris she's hoping will bloom this year! Here's her list:



Planted in 2019 (left to right)
TBs *Touch of Gossip*, *Vibrato*,
When In Love (below) & *SDB Hotentot*
(upper right)

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NEW IRIS IN OUR GARDENS (CONT.)



New

Loretta gets this page all to her iris hopefuls:

TBs *Action Packed*, *Awesome Alex*, *Battlestar Atlantis*, *Before the Storm***, *Dark Storm*, *Devil's Fork*, *Fashion Magic*, *First Prize*, *Global Warmer*, *Roman Song*, *Royal Storm*, *Rustling Devil*, *Scoonchee*, *What a Feeling*, *Mayan Mysteries*, and waiting in pots for her new raised bed ~ TBs *Gossett's Gamble*, *I'm So Confused*, *Lightly Buttered*, *Optic Overload* (see page 7 for Loretta's potted iris)



Iris in Loretta's Garden
(shown top to bottom):
Roman Song, *Action Packed*,
Awesome Alex, *Battlestar Atlantis*



(Left to Right, Top to Bottom)

Devils Fork, *Before The Storm*, *Fashion Magic*, *Dark Storm*, *First Prize*, *Global Warmer*, *Mayan Mysteries*, *Royal Storm*, *Rustling Devil*, *Scoonchee*



**Cynthe's has planted this iris, too. (continued page 11)

CONTACT INFO. BIRTHDAYS

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Best Wishes to Our Friends with February, March & April Birthdays!!!

February

Candis Peters ~ February 1th
 Cheryl Giovenco ~ February 2nd
 Bill Water ~ February 17th
 Diane Thornbrugh ~ February 23rd
 Betty Ziffer ~ February 28th



March

Stan Book ~ March 9th
 Loretta Bresof ~ March 11th
 Joella Cheek ~ March 12th
 Vera Stewart ~ March 14th
 Judy Book ~ March 27th
 Loretta Lyall ~ March 31st



April

Bridget Bernardi ~ April 5th
 Amy Williams ~ April 12th
 Robin Water ~ April 15th
 Cynthe Brush ~ April 19th
 Dennis Lueblin ~ April 22nd

(Top to Bottom)
 Gossett's Gamble,
 I'm So Confused,
 Lightly Buttered,
 Optic Overload



IRIS ~ 3 COMMON MYTHS (CONT.)

half of the rhizome above the soil surface. I think these last two points (a recommendation for planting with exposed rhizomes and the fact that irises bloom best in sunny locations) led people to blend these two ideas together and conclude that it is sunlight striking the tops of the rhizomes that causes irises to bloom. The advice not to plant them deep like tulips or daffodils then reinforces this notion.

Okay, if it is not necessary to expose the rhizomes to direct sunlight to ensure bloom, should I plant them exposed or covered? What is the best planting depth?

The short answer is that it just doesn't matter very much. In most gardens, irises with the rhizomes exposed and irises covered with a half inch or inch of soil will both do equally well. If you look at an established clump, you will see that the rhizomes themselves sometimes grow down into the soil and sometimes grow up onto the surface. It's all good.

In some locales, particular climate conditions can favor either shallow or deep planting. In a climate that is often rainy and humid, exposed rhizomes are less likely to rot from wet soil. Much of our traditional gardening advice comes from places with such climates: the UK and the eastern seaboard of the US. I believe the advice to plant with rhizomes exposed originated in these areas, and then was simply repeated.

In areas with very cold winters, irises may benefit from being planted more deeply, making them less susceptible to heaving during freeze-thaw cycles.

In dry, hot regions (such as much of the western US), planting with the rhizomes covered offers some protection against sun-scalding and desiccation from heat and wind. The rhizomes appreciate being below the soil surface, where conditions are a little cooler and moister.

Bottom Line: Plant covered or uncovered, according to your preference, experience, and local advice. Irises will bloom just fine either way.

Myth #2: Irises Can "Revert" to Some Other Color

It seems like everyone has heard a story of a beautiful clump of irises, say nice ruffled pinks, "reverting" to white or purple after a few years. In fact, this does not happen. Irises

do not spontaneously change color. (There is one minor qualification to this statement, which I will address below.)

Where does this myth come from? One source, I think, is that some plants do appear to behave this way, particularly annuals that reseed each year. If one plants a hybrid zinnia or morning glory, for example, the plants that come up from their seed in future years will not look like the original, and in fact may show simple "wild type" colors common in the original species from which the hybrid was developed. A second source of this myth comes from the fact that if different irises are planted together, one of them may multiply faster and eventually take over the planting, making it seem to the casual observer that the irises in the planting have "changed" from the color that was originally common in the planting to the one that eventually took over. But note carefully that this is competition between two different plants, not a single plant changing color.

In almost all cases where people say their irises have "changed color" or "reverted", this is the explanation: there was more than one variety in the planting to begin with, and one that had not bloomed the first year or two grew well and came to dominate the planting in later years.

It is possible for the coloring of an iris to appear somewhat different from one year to the next, because of weather differences or chemical exposure. The blue and violet pigments, in particular, are somewhat sensitive to unusual weather. These changes are changes in the darkness or saturation of color, though, and cannot result in a whole new color or pattern. A pale blue iris may appear to be cool white in one year or sky blue in another year, for example, but will never become yellow or pink. Some herbicides cause deformed blooms with color strongly depleted in some parts of the petals, but the deformity is obvious.

There are a couple other ways an iris of a different color can appear in a planting, even if only one variety was planted to begin with.

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IRIS ~ 3 COMMON MYTHS (CONT.)

The first is hybridization. Just as your morning glories may reseed themselves, so a bearded iris may occasionally form a seed pod and drop its seeds into the soil around the plant. If these seeds sprout, the seedlings may well be a different color than the parent, and when they bloom (perhaps three years after the seeds are first produced), the gardener may be in for a surprise! To prevent this from hap-pening, you can remove the bloom stalks after the flowers fade, so that seed pods do not develop.

Although possible, seedlings appearing in a bearded iris clump this way seldom happens. Most bearded irises do not produce seed on their own. (In my garden, I see maybe two spontaneous seed pods for every thousand blooms.) And bearded iris seeds don't germinate well in many climates without special attention. If seedlings do sprout in an established clump, they will likely be crowded out by the parent. Hybridizers go to a great deal of trouble to get bearded irises to cross-pollinate and to grow the seeds to maturity. The process can and does happen without human intervention, but only seldom. (If you grow beardless irises like Siberians, the appearance of unexpected seedlings is much more likely.)

Finally, an iris may experience a mutation that causes the flower color to change. Such mutations, called "sports", are extremely rare events. Except for a few historic varieties that are prone to such mutations, most irises will never produce a sport. You can grow a thousand different varieties for a decade

and never see one. I started growing irises in the 1970s, and have never seen a sport in my garden, or in the gardens of any of my iris-growing friends.

Bottom Line: Bearded irises do not spontaneously change color. Each iris is a unique individual, and will retain its original color and pattern forever. If you see a different colored iris in a planting, it must be a different variety that was already there and just had not bloomed, or had not been noticed, before.

Myth #3: Iris Foliage Should Be Trimmed Back in the Fall

It's a ritual that some gardeners swear by: attacking their iris beds in August or September with shears, resulting in a defoliated war zone that looks as though someone had come through the garden with a lawn mower set at 8 inches. Sadly, those irises are now deprived of much of their food source: photosynthesis in green leaves.

Why do people do this? What makes them think that cutting leaves in half is good for their plants? I think there are two sources for this myth. The first is that many perennials do benefit from being cut back at certain times of year, to stimulate new growth, and a new flush of bloom in some cases. But if you are an observant gardener, you will notice that the anatomy of these plants is different from that of irises. These plants have buds along their stems. Removing the tops of the stems encourages the lower buds to grow, resulting in bushier, more vigorous plants. But irises do not grow this way. All the leaves of a fan emerge from a

single bud at the tip of the rhizome. When you trim a fan back, you are just chopping leaves in half, not removing any upper buds to stimulate lower buds into new growth

The second source of this myth is that when irises are dug and divided, the fan is traditionally trimmed back. This is how irises are generally sold: bare-root, with roots and fan trimmed back to about 6 or 8 inches. This trimming is a good idea for an iris that has been dug and divided. Its growth has been interrupted, and it will take some time for new growth to emerge from the rhizome. During that time, a big fan of leaves can weaken the plant by drawing too much water and energy from the rhizome. The leaves lose water by transpiration, which the old damaged roots are not able to replenish. A big fan also makes it easy for the newly planted iris to topple over or become uprooted. But these reasons only apply to plants that have been dug and divided; they are not applicable at all to plants left growing in the soil, undisturbed.

Some have said that trimming back in the fall helps discourage iris borers which lay their eggs in the leaves at this time of year. The eggs, however, overwinter in dead, dry leaves, not growing green leaves. Removing dead foliage is helpful; cutting green leaves in half is not. The recommended procedure for borer control is to remove all dead foliage and burn it in late winter or early spring.

Some just think the trimmed fans look tidier. This is understandable. By the end of summer, iris foliage often

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IRIS ~ 3 COMMON MYTHS (CONT.)



The foliage on this clump on the left should not be trimmed. If you want to tidy up, remove just the dead leaves (1) and (2) and the dry end of leaf (3).

looks pretty tired and unattractive. Many leaves are drying at the tips, getting a little pale and floppy, and perhaps suffering from damage from insects or other ailments. Ironically, if you trim the leaves back, then the tops where you cut them will just turn brown and dry up, so instead of tall leaves with dry ends, you have short leaves with dry ends. Was it really worth it?

Bottom Line: Cutting through the green fans of an iris in the fall does not help the plant, and may weaken it slightly, as you are reducing its capacity for food production through photosynthesis. Irises are rugged, and this slight weakening is something most of them can cope with without suffering much, but why put them through it at all? It does "tidy" your garden, but that only benefits the aesthetic sensibilities of the gardener. It does not help the irises in any way. If you want to tidy up at this time of year, restrict your activity to removing dead foliage and dry leaf ends. Don't cut green leaves!

Roger Duncan - In Remembrance

It is with sadness, we share the passing of Roger Duncan, co-owner of Superstition Iris Garden.

Rick Tasco wrote on the Superstition Iris Garden Facebook webpage: *"It is with extreme sorrow that I announce the passing of my partner of 47 years, Roger Duncan. He passed away suddenly yesterday morning (Jan 6, 2020) of unknown causes. I am awaiting the medical examiner's report to see if they have anything definitive. Many of you know that Roger was suffering from back pains for the last month and somehow this may be somewhat responsible. Roger was the backbone of Superstition and it won't be the same without him. He did not want a viewing or celebration of life so posting this on Facebook is one way to celebrate his life. He had many friends and customers here. I'm sure they will miss him."*



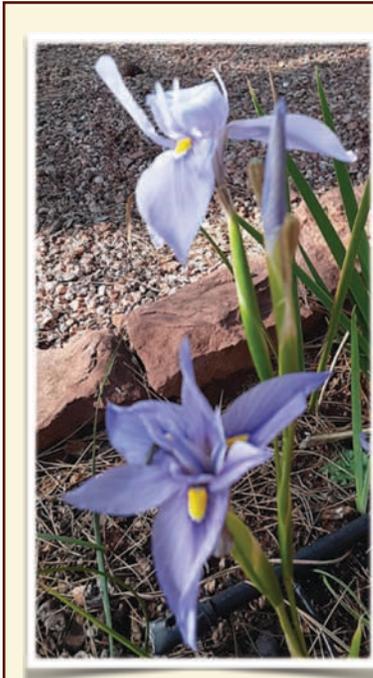
Roger Duncan (left) and Rick Tasco of Superstition Iris Garden

*Left to Right:
Hollywood Nights (2000), Fantasy Ride (2009), All Night Long (2011) & Outside The Lines (2020)*



NEW IRIS (CONT.) & MINI ARTICLES

Cynthe Brush ~ Another member with LOTS of enthusiasm! has 33 new-to-her iris planted, hoping 10-20 will bloom for the first time this spring. In her new 'black iris' bed: (left to right, top to bottom) SDB *Drady*, TBs *Hello Darkness*, *Ebony Queen*, *Before the Storm*, Historic *Demi-Deuil*, MTB *Black Olive*



Marge Larson's Garden Mystery Solved!

*On 12-5-2019 Marge Larson wrote: I recently attended Sun Country Iris Society's 50th Anniversary dinner. There was a bouquet of these – their name is *Moraea polystachya* and they spread by seed. They appeared 3 weeks ago in my spuria bed! Amazing!*

Moraea polystachya in Marge's spuria bed



Plantings in her 'Family Heritage' iris bed: (left to right, top to bottom) TBs *Innocent Star*, *Amas*, *Bold Pattern*, *Gay Parasol*, *Cybergrape*

NEW IRIS IN OUR GARDENS (CONT.)

Assorted iris still in nursery beds, or destined for color-themed beds, or featured in Cynthe's street-side 'Showcase' iris bed:
 (left, top to bottom) TBs *Kaila's Dance*, *God's Handiwork*, IB *Calling Card*, Historic *Glen Ellen*, TB *Mahogany Muse*
 (right, top to bottom) SDB *Canine Caper*, TBs *Cherub's Smile*, *Mesmerizer*, *Quiet Beauty*, *Can't Touch This*, & *Waves of Joy*



SPRING
Is in the air