

June 2026

# TAIS Newsletter

Tucson Area Iris Society - established 1965

Our 61<sup>th</sup> year

An Affiliate of the American Iris Society



**'Kathy Chilton'**  
(Kerr, 2005)

Garden of S. Clark & D. Smith,  
Chandler, Arizona

Photo by Sue Clark, May 25, 2026

## President's Message

It was not only us. At the recent AIS convention, I learned that a great conversation starter went something like, "So what was wrong with your winter weather?" Invariably, it was the multiple cold and warm extremes, followed by the worst bloom season they could remember. I continue to anticipate above-average precipitation and closer-to-average temperatures through our next bloom season. If whatever you did for your iris to survive last summer didn't meet expectations, try something different. I'm going to water less frequently but for a longer duration. We had a good discussion of summer survival techniques and rot at our May meeting. See p. 8.

- Kevin Kartchner

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*"It was June, and the world smelled of roses. The sunshine was like powdered gold over the grassy hillside." ~ Maud Hart Lovelace in Betsy-Tacy and Tib 🌹*

## Upcoming Events

June & July: No meetings these months. Newsletters will continue

August 8: 1 PM, Tucson Botanical Gardens. TAIS Rhizome Auction, one of our few members-only events & one of our fundraisers

September 19: TAIS Rhizome Sale, 9-noon, Harlow's Gardens

October: TAIS Annual Photo Contest - start choosing and editing your best photos! Limit = 15 photos per member

October 17: Region 15 Trek hosted by TAIS, 9 AM - 4 PM, Tohono Chul. No regular meeting this month

### Birthday Wishes to:

**Rebecca Hill**

**Christy Lewalski**

**Tamsin Grosskreutz**

**R & S Lange**



*Iris pallida*

Source: Pierre-Joseph Redoute, Les Liliacées, 1812

# May Meeting Minutes



9 May 2026 - Seventeen members and a guest gathered at the Miller-Golf Links Library for a presentation by Pat called The Fragrant Iris. Scented irises in the garden were mentioned, while most of the program focused on their use in various perfumes and other products. See summary in "Did you Know" on p. 11.

**General Meeting:** We are still looking for someone to chair our Auction in August. Kevin thanked those who tended potted irises to sell at last month's show: Bonnie, Terry, Linda, and Diane. Sales totaled \$580. Thank you again to all who made the show a success! Kudoos were given to Linda and Cindy for the food at the Show. **Does anyone know who made the ginger cookies?** We want the recipe! Bonnie brought up that only judges, clerks, and the Show Chair are permitted in the room during judging. Next year, chairman Terry will ask everyone else to leave the room for those two hours. He will also arrange for some

signage to direct guests from the street corner, parking lot, and door to the exhibit hall in the basement of the church.

Terry presented two AIS certificates to Kevin for Best Specimen of Show and most TB blue ribbons. Dan received one for his blue ribbon, and I received two: Best Design of Show and Design Sweepstakes. These three individuals also received Iris Bucks for their blue ribbon entries.

Pat spoke on our upcoming Fall Trek, which will be at Tohono Chul and cost \$60, which will include lunch. The registration form is on our website. Guests may stay on for an evening concert at no charge. Jody offered to host TAIS members for a dinner between the Trek and the concert since she and John live near the garden.

Kevin initiated a discussion on rot. See my notes on p. 8.

Door prizes of potted irises were won by Jim, Nancy, Jody, and Kevin. Sue and Pat won bottles of Crabtree &

Evelyn liquid soap for gardeners. **Board Meeting:** Pat will do a presentation for about 100 people at a conference of the Arizona Federation of Garden Clubs next April. They have offered a table for TAIS to sell potted irises. We discussed whether to place a club order for some rhizomes to sell. Bonnie and Joyce have offered to grow them. Terry suggested that members might donate some to this cause. Sale leftovers will be sold or raffled at the Trek. Then what will we sell at next year's show? Guest rhizomes from the Region 15 Spring Trek that are usually part of our August Auction will not be dug until late September, so what do we do with those after receiving them at the Trek in October? An auction at the Trek is not permitted. No decisions were made at this time... [More on this later].

Our 2027 iris show conflicts with the Region 15 Spring Trek in San Diego. We may do best securing judges for our show from New Mexico, which is in Region 23.

- Sue Clark, secretary

**Thank you to Karen Kartchner for helping at our Iris Show!**



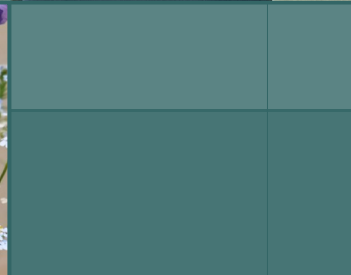
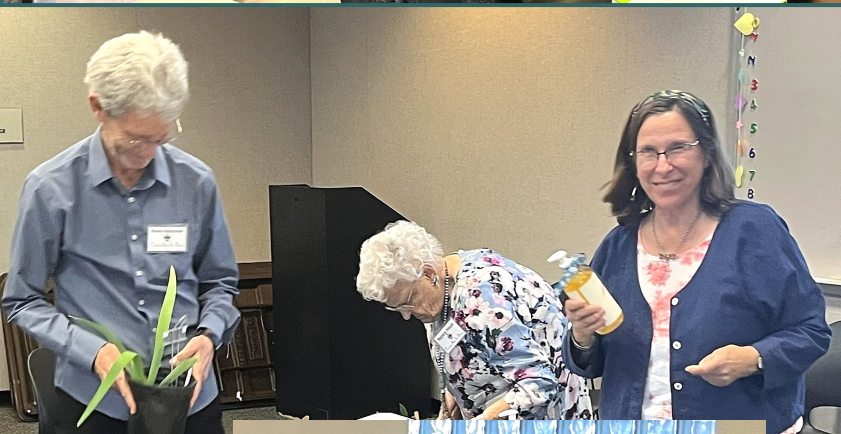
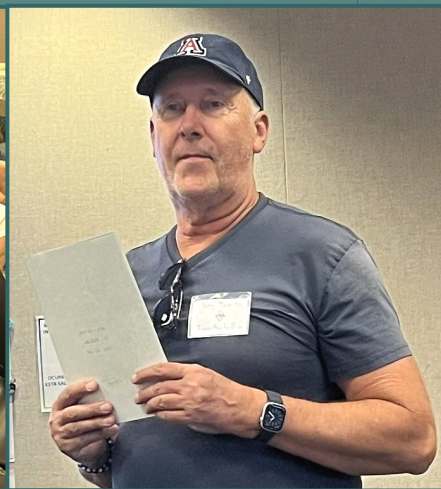
**We're on the web: [Tucsoniris.org](http://Tucsoniris.org)**

## Some Fragrant Irises

Pat mentioned these fragrant irises in her garden: **'Gingersnap'** (Schreiners, 1964) - smells like root beer **'Harvest of Memories'** (Zurbrigg, 1984) **'Flirtini'** (M. Sutton, 2011) **'Rum is the Reason'** (Schreiners, 2017)

And these that she wants: **'Quik'** - (Spoon, 2011) - smells like chocolate **'Sugar Blues'** Re (Zurbrigg, 1984)

# May Meeting - photos by Dave Smith & two by Sue



# Treasurer's Report for May

- submitted by Jim Wilcoxon

<b>BEGINNING BALANCE</b>	<b>15,018.89</b>
<b>INCOME</b>	
Dues	30.00
Trek	<u>120.00</u>
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>150.00</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>	
Refreshments	10.32
AZ Corp. Fee	12.00
AIS Affiliate Fee	30.00
New Projector	<u>742.69</u>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>810.61</b>
<b>ENDING BALANCE</b>	<b>14,359.28</b>



From top: one of Joyce's iris leaves - note the yellow-brown streak down the edge. This is the warning sign. Some of my leaves - Oh, bummer - I've got mealybugs, too... Me attempting some eradication with a Q-tip dripped in rubbing alcohol on 11 May 2026. My Louisianas have more mealybugs than my TBs, but several TBs do have them. I noticed that mealybugs seem to prefer the outer leaves in the fans. - SC (Photos by Joyce, me, Dave)

## Iris Pests, Part IIC - More on Mealybug Elimination

Last month we learned, and possibly chuckled, about Joyce's ongoing quest to eradicate the mealybugs that have taken up residence in her irises, canna lilies, and Sonoran lilies. Her current attempt is using a granular form of [Bonide Systemic Insect Control](#). Now remember, Joyce did not choose this product lightly, as it contains Imidocloprid, a neonicotinoid which is implicated in bee decline. She had tried squishing the mealybugs and using methods #1-4 below, over three growing seasons with no success. In fact, their numbers kept increasing, and they spread to other plants. Mealybugs are tiny, but are no laughing matter. Joyce spoke to a hybridizer at the AIS convention in Billings last year and learned that they often use systemic insecticides as well as fungicides to keep irises healthy in the fields. If you don't want to use a systemic insecticide because they are indiscriminate, let's look at some options:

1. **Inspect irises regularly, watching for cottony spots and leaves with a yellow-to-brown streak down one edge. Thanks to Joyce, I realized that I have mealybugs in my irises. Dip a cotton swab in rubbing alcohol and touch it to infested areas. This method is often effective for controlling small infestations. Pat sprays mealybugs with a 50-50 mix of water and 70% Isopropyl alcohol (rubbing alcohol).**
2. **Blast them off with water. (Don't do this if temperatures are above 85°, though, or your iris fans will steam to death in the heat).**
3. **Spray with a solution of a few drops of Neem oil mixed with water. Neem disrupts their life cycle.**
4. **Spray with Insecticidal Soap, which causes them to suffocate.**
5. **Apply a hot pepper spray made by whirling 2-3 hot peppers with 2 c water in a blender, letting it sit for 24 hours, and then straining the solids and spraying with the liquid. (Test it on one leaf first).**

Some tips for preventing mealybug infestations: inspect iris plants regularly, remove dead leaves from iris plants so the mealybugs cannot hide there, don't overfertilize as this can attract mealybugs, don't overwater or crowd irises, and make your garden a welcoming spot for ladybugs and lacewings, as they eat mealybugs - grow cosmos, marigolds, yarrow, & dill. - SC

Sources: [Imidocloprid General Fact Sheet](#); [How to Get Rid of Mealybugs on Iris Plant | Live to Plant](#); [Mealybugs on African Iris: Easy Solutions That You Can Try - Plant America](#)

## Region 15 Spring Trek by Joyce Knill

On April 10-11, four TAIS members attended the Region 15 Spring Trek, graciously hosted by the Phoenix area Sun Country Iris Society: Dave Smith, Sue Clark, Bonnie Else, and me. Having never attended a Trek, we were looking forward to the experience before TAIS hosts the Fall Trek on Oct. 17.

It was an education from Friday evening's Bonnie Nichols presentation to the closing on Saturday afternoon. The attendees were exceptionally fun and friendly, the meals were all amazing, and the host club was very well organized.

Current AIS President Nichols presented her program on Novelty Iris, which includes Broken Color, Color Break, Variegated Blossom, Variegated Foliage, Space Age (Horns, Flounce, Spoons, Feathers, Pompoms, etc.), and Flatties. (Flatties may have additional falls or no falls, additional standards, or no standards at all). Novelty iris may be found in any category of iris. She discussed the history of each and the importance of form and proportion when judging Novelty Iris in a show or garden. We learned to look beyond the unique color and remember that variation in the iris must appear 85% of the time, sequence of bloom is as important as bud count, as well as the importance of ratio of stalk to fan.


An iris we frequently see in our TAIS Fall sale, introduced by Lloyd Austin in 1952 is 'Unicorn,' the first Spage Age iris. Other Novelty iris we may see include 2002 Dykes winner 'Mesmerizer,' complete with white flounce and pompom, and the 1997 Dykes winner 'Thornbird,' with horns - both introduced by Byers.

Following Friday's Judges training, a brief Region 15 Board meeting was held. Each club representative stood and reported upcoming events (our Fall Trek!) and we heard plans for the future of our region. Soon the results of the Popularity Poll for Region 15 will be available. This will list iris which performed well for AIS members in our region, not throughout the country. The Spring Trek iris were donated by various hybridizers and grown in the Phoenix area.

Bonnie and I noted the various clubs' programs to encourage members to participate in club activities such as the iris show, additional fundraising ideas, community outreach plans, and even where to buy 1-2 gallon pots for our club. All AIS clubs are encouraged to join the Affiliate Workgroup meetings, hosted by past AIS President Jody Nolan, to learn of tips to strengthen our club's activities.

Saturday morning featured visits to three Phoenix member gardens which we enjoyed. President Nichols held an enlightening Judges training 'in garden.' Here the importance of bud count, fans and rhizome increase were exhibited and discussed.

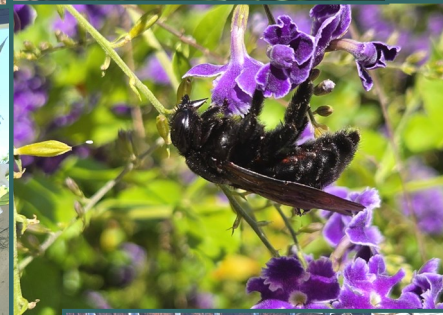
Tucson's Bacterial Rot (the rhizome smells like stinky feet) and Southern Blight Fungus (the iris fans look good one day, and the next, fall over) symptoms were presented in the afternoon session. We learned 'substance' is critical when selecting an iris: how long an iris holds its color and shape. President Nichols, whose growing fields are in the Dallas area, related her frustrating experience with SDBs, MDBs, and Siberians due to our warming winters. These irises need substantial chill hours in order to bloom in the Spring, which explains why they do not consistently bloom in Tucson. Nichols also pointed out that not all iris excel everywhere, and sometimes an iris will just rot for no reason. She suggested it may be a quirk of that iris in your location, and a solution would be to try a different iris. A question came up on variegated foliage iris and she explained that they perform better with shade.

The program closed with door prize drawings, results of the silent auction, and a great 'teaser' slide presentation for the April 2027 AIS National Convention in Oklahoma. This promises to be another exceptional AIS experience! 

# Region 15 Spring Trek - photos by Sue Clark & 2 by Joyce



# Region 15 Spring Trek - photos by Sue & one by MJ King



## Region 15 Spring Trek - photos by Beth Train and a Guest



### Bacterial Soft Rot Issues and Ideas

Kevin led a discussion about rot at our May meeting since the summer heat is upon us. Most types of irises do not like to be too wet, with Louisianas and *Iris psuedocorus* being exceptions. Japanese irises also tolerate a bit of wetness. But most irises will rot if their rhizomes are wet. Spurias do not rot as much, possibly because they are dormant in summer.

Soft rot is caused by a bacterium, *Pectobacterium carotovorum*, formerly called *Erwinia carotovorum*. As you might guess from the name, this bacterium attacks carrots. It rots potatoes, leafy greens, and irises as well. Kevin has not found any research about it and irises, except for using Mosquito Dunks to fight it. Read about that [here](#).

Kevin pointed out that all of us, except for Susan, have struggled with rot. Since she was not present, we recalled her practices. She grows in Talavera pots, all of which are elevated in plant stands. She waters 3 times a week via drip, and she divides yearly, replacing half of her soil with new potting mix and replanting only the largest rhizome from each pot.

#### Soil

Terry mentioned that Melania and Tony had great results with Tanks Cactus Mix, which drains well.

#### Water

Pat, who lives in Vail, Arizona, turns off the irrigation to her raised beds from June through August, so her irises get no water besides rain or if they seem overly dry. To determine this, she moves some soil aside with her hand. If it feels cool and damp at 6" down, she keeps the water off during this interval. She has heard of someone buying a farm in the Elgin area in which the irises had not been watered for 15 years, and the rhizomes were huge.

Kevin's irises are in the ground and they receive drip irrigation 2X/week unless there is a rainstorm, at which time the drip is temporarily turned off. This summer, he will try

watering less often, but more deeply.

#### Grooming

Best practice is to remove dead leaves, which Pat mentioned also tends to remove a bunch of mealybugs. In 2025, Kevin did not remove dead leaves and suffered more rot, possibly because they trapped moisture.

#### To Shade or Not to Shade

Kevin used shade cloth a few summers ago and had a poor bloom season.

#### Treat or Not?

Kevin has tried scraping out all visible rot and treating with Comet cleanser. The idea is that the bleach in the cleanser will kill the bacteria. But - no luck! He figures that the roots are still pumping water into the rhizome and to the rot, and probably bringing in more of the bacteria from the soil, where it resides. He has had the most success digging up the rhizome, removing the rot, and then allowing the rhizome to dry out for several days before replanting it.

Try something, make notes about what you did, and report back in the fall! Best of luck! - SC

## The Language of Iris #5 by Pat Olsen

### “S” is for Standard Dwarf Bearded

Standard Dwarf Bearded irises, known as **SDBs**, may be short, but they make a big impression in the garden. Recognized by the American Iris Society, SDBs stand **more than 8 inches but no taller than 16 inches** in bloom. They bridge the gap between the Miniature Dwarf Bearded (MDBs) and Tall Bearded (TBs).

Their slightly taller stature makes them easier to appreciate from across the garden, and their blooms are often larger, fuller, and more plentiful. Many SDBs are among the most dependable irises in the landscape.

SDBs typically **bloom just after MDBs**, helping bridge the gap between the earliest MDBs and the main TB season.

In Southern Arizona, that often means:

- Early March into April
- Earlier after warm winters
- A shorter bloom window during rapid spring heat-ups

Unlike MDBs, which strongly reflect *Iris pumila* ancestry, SDBs were developed by crossing dwarf irises with taller bearded types. The result:

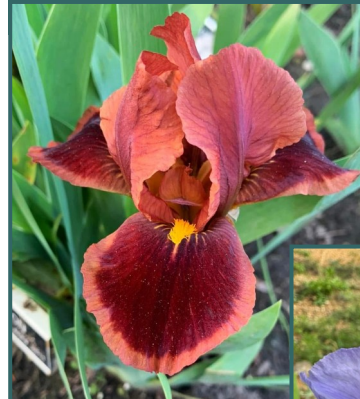
- Better branching
- Larger flowers
- Expanded color range
- Stronger garden presence

And then there are the fascinating **arilbred (AB) SDBs**. These combine Standard Dwarf Bearded characteristics with aril ancestry, often bringing:

- Dramatic signal patterns
- Rich desert-inspired colors
- Distinctive form

In warm, dry climates, some arilbred SDBs can be especially rewarding. See bottom two photos, right.

Continued on next page...



Some of Pat's SDB irises. From top: 'Open Your Eyes,' 'Oh Canada,' 'Dragon Candy,' (AB) 'Shepaug River,' and (AB) 'Shabaza'

## The Language of Iris #5, continued...

SDBs are excellent container plants. Their compact size makes them ideal for:

- Patio pots
- Entryway containers
- Mixed seasonal displays

They're large enough to make an impact but small enough to stay in proportion.

**A Tucson Tip** - If an SDB seems reluctant to bloom in full desert exposure, consider moving it to a location with:

- Morning sun
- Afternoon protection
- Less reflected heat

Sometimes just a bit of relief from intense desert sun improves performance dramatically.

## More Reasons that Irises may not Bloom

This year, it seems like our warmer than usual winter prevented our irises from having lots of flowers. Here are some other reasons that they might not bloom.

**1. They have become too crowded.** Although their leaves may still look fine, tightly-packed irises stop flowering. The solution is to divide them, replanting the healthy rhizomes about 12-18" apart and destroying any unhealthy ones. Do not compost them. Division is also a chance to donate rhizomes to the TAIS Rhizome Sale and give some to friends.

**2. The rhizomes are planted too deeply.** The top of the rhizome should be close to the surface or even exposed. (Note: Exposure is a point of debate between irisarians). Avoid mulching over the rhizomes, especially the crown. And avoid watering the plant from above - only water the soil.

**3. They are not getting enough sun,** possibly because nearby trees and shrubs have grown enough to block the sunlight that they need to bloom - 8 hours a day during our cooler season. Our irises need shade in the hot season.

**4. They did not get enough water during the late winter-early spring when they are setting their buds.** Deep watering is better than more frequent, shallow watering.

**5. Fertilizer had a high nitrogen content.** Use something like a 5-10-10 mix in early spring and after bloom season. - SC

Source: [Why aren't my irises blooming? 5 common causes and how to fix them](#)

## Trek Update by Pat Olsen

*Attendees at the Region 15 Spring Trek expressed enthusiasm for TAIS hosting the Region 15 Fall Trek, with a few attendees already making reservations, eager to experience Tucson.*

We're excited to share that registrations are beginning to arrive for our TAIS Region 15 Fall Trek and it is encouraging to see our attendee list growing. We look forward to welcoming Region 15 members from Southern California and across Arizona for a memorable day.

Due to conflicting schedules, the Trek Committee could not meet in May. To keep planning moving forward, the agenda items originally scheduled for that meeting will be divided between our next two planning sessions.

The Murphy-Wilmot Library large meeting room has been reserved for the following dates:  
 June 13, 2026 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm  
 July 11, 2026 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Our June meeting will focus on several important "first impressions" details, including:

- TAIS host identification and visibility
- Name tags
- Registration flow and check-in process
- Attendee welcome materials and goodie bags

Joyce Knill has joined the Trek Committee and will take lead on registration and check-in.

All TAIS Members are invited to attend and participate in the planning process. Whether you'll like to help with logistics, share ideas, or simply stay informed, your input and enthusiasm are always welcome as we work together to host Region 15.

**TAIS OFFICERS, ETC. FOR 2026**

- Kevin Kartchner - President
- Cindy Long - Vice President
- Sue Clark – Secretary, Signatory on Account
- Jim Wilcoxon – Treasurer, Asst. Secretary
- Pat Olsen & Brian Moon - Programs & Places
- Diane Pavlovich - Publicity
- Cindy Long & Linda Briggs - Hospitality
- Bonnie Else & Susan Schaefer - Door Prizes
- Linda Briggs and Cindy Long - Membership
- Dave Smith - Photographer
- Sue Clark - Newsletter

**What to do in the Iris Garden during June:**

**Maintenance:** Monitor soil with moisture meter and water irises when it reads close to dry. Evening watering is best at this time of year. Be sure to water the soil and not the fans, or they will “cook” in the heat. Check for aphids and other pests. Remove pests, weeds, and debris. Update or create a map of your iris beds and containers in case labels fade or disappear. Sharpie labels will fade! Replace faded labels. Remove spent stems near base using scissors to avoid damaging the rhizome. Move pots to shade. Add 40% shade cloth to irises in beds.

**Organic care:** Feed with fish emulsion every other week and with feather meal and alfalfa meal (or alfalfa pellets) monthly. Apply humic acid as desired.

**Non-Organic care:** No fertilizer required till fall.  
- SC



**Tip Exchange**

During lunch at the iris show, Dale Liggett, one of the judges, told those of us at her table that she grows her irises in raised beds in the Phoenix area. Her beds are three blocks high to create some depth and are filled with a mixture of one part peat moss, one part perlite, and one part potting soil. - SC

Summer watering is different for irises in pots, as compared to those in the ground and to those in raised beds. Keep some notes about what you do this summer and how it worked. - SC

**Limerick**

There once was a day in June  
In a month that came way too soon.  
Wasn't it just January?  
And then it was February?  
How could it now be June?  
- Sue Clark



Source: AIS Wiki

'Orange Parade'

**Did You Know?**

Fields of *Iris pallida* (see illustration at bottom of p. 1) are grown in France and Italy. Their rhizomes are collected, washed, peeled, and dried for three years, after which they are ground into a powder. This powder is distilled into orris butter (a wax), and then distilled further until compounds called *irones* form. One end product is a 60% irone fluid known as Orris Absolute. This very expensive liquid is used in perfumes and other beauty products. Pat brought samples of four iris-rich perfumes for us to sniff and enjoy at our May meeting: [Chanel #19 Poudré](#), [Prada Infusion d'iris](#), [Hermes Hiris](#), and [JC Brosseau Ombré Rose](#). She recommends purchasing them from a reputable source. - SC, my notes from Pat's presentation

**"People don't notice whether it's winter or summer when they're happy." - Anton Chekhov**

**A Little Bit of Botany and Iris History**

Last month, I mentioned Melba Hamblin as co-editor of [The World of Irises](#) with Bee Warburton. Melba has been recognized as one of the most important iris hybridizers of the 20th century. Her nursery, Mission Bell Gardens, was located in Roy, Utah, a few miles north of Salt Lake City. Melba began growing irises in 1936 and hybridizing them in 1943. A Utah hybridizer named Tell Muhlstein became her mentor, and later Melba mentored many other breeders including Keith Keppel, Joe Chio, Paul Black, and Perry Dyer.

Each of Melba's introductions had been grown by people she trusted in climates across the United States. And she expected these friends to be critical in their feedback if need be. She pulled one of her TBs from introduction based on its poor performance that year, even though it had already been advertised in the AIS Bulletin and in Melba's own catalog.

Tall Bearded were Melba's specialties. Some important ones were '[Orange Parade](#)' (1958), which was a runner-up for the Dykes Medal twice; and '[Royal Gold](#)' (1964), which was featured on the cover of The Golden Anniversary Issue of the AIS Bulletin in January 1970. Her Border Bearded '[Tulare](#)' (1961) was considered the standard by which to judge a BB until at least 2007. This brilliant yellow iris with its thick gold beards was vigorous and healthy unlike many early BBs. Also unusual was that it stayed consistently within the specifications of the class. Another of Melba's BBs, '[Raspberry Blush](#)' (1975) was the first BB identified as exhibiting some fertility. All had been considered sterile to this point. It won the Sass Medal in 1981. Thank you, Melba! - SC

Sources: "Melba Bills Hamblin" by Perry Dyer in *AIS 100 Years Bold*, Supplement 2 of 4 to *IRISES: the Bulletin of AIS*, 2020; [Iris Registration - American Iris Society \(irises.org\)](#); AIS Wiki for links to photos