

IRIS PROJECT HISTORY

The Iris SIG is an outgrowth of the Iris Project that began in 2007 when a huge donation of iris plants was made to the Sun City Horticulture Club's nursery and iris inventory.

Today, Iris SIG members care for hundred of bearded iris located in 10 beds within the community gardens. Six beds are located in the rear of the gardens; four are along the left side near the nursery area. Plants are inventoried and maintained year round. Members identify, dig, and divide those that may be sold to residents and the general public at the Horticulture Club's plant sales in Spring and Fall.

Why join? Some new members say they've always loved irises and want to learn more about how to grow them in central Texas. Long-time members say it's been a good way to meet like-minded and friendly people.

Some also are members of the American Iris Society, which celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2020 and publishes valuable information both online and in print form. Given resources available in Sun City, joining the Iris SIG is a convenient and fun way to obtain clear and reliable information about irises and those who love them!

BACKGROUND

In early 2007, the SCHC received an extraordinary gift of more than 2,500 dormant (unidentified) bearded iris rhizomes from the Snyder family in Bartlett, TX. Added to the approximately 200 iris donated by non-members and the 100 the club had in inventory (origin unknown), the total number in mid-2007 was approximately 2800 iris rhizomes.

The original Iris SIG members, Al & Ziggy Aufforth and Mark Picker, located the iris in three new beds 6' x 24' in the Iris Area behind the Nursery. They also planted iris in several other locations around the garden as landscaping. Linda & Larry Vandebrake started the first efforts at inventorying varieties already in the garden; they literally had their hands full! In the first year, only about 25% of the iris bloomed and they seemed to represent 58 unique varieties . As of 2011, 25 varieties had been researched and verified.

As the iris matured and were separated, more beds were added in the Iris Area and the Nursery bringing it to its current number of 10. Cataloguing the iris was a challenge for Linda, Larry, and Kathy Miller, another volunteer who said she knew

nothing about flowers in general and iris in particular when she started helping to pull weeds and vines along the fence! Kathy was asked to take over the Iris Project as Linda Vanderbrake's replacement and stayed in that leadership position until 2018 when Al and Barbara Elliott agreed to take over so Kathy could travel.

Al Elliott and his wife Barbara led the SIG from 2018 until Spring 2021 when the SIG's sale inventory of 110 potted iris sold out in the first 45 minutes of the Horticulture Club's sale. Efforts are ongoing to properly maintain and improve current inventory for sales after a difficult year that included a Covid-19 disruption and a harsh winter ice storm. New members and donations are accepted year-round by contacting Carol Servino, the current SIG leader.