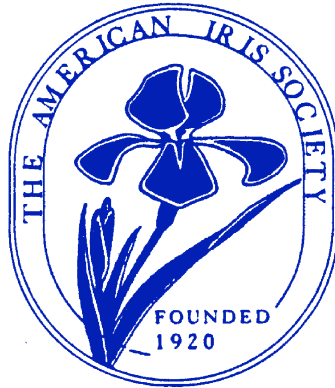


Spring | 2012



Marketing Handbook

The American Iris Society

The Marketing & PR Committee is happy to have produced this marketing tool for your local iris club, AIS Region or AIS Cooperating Society. Some of the ideas expressed here are common sense to all those of us involved in non-profit groups of all kinds, while others were newly and deliberately developed for the iris world. These are ideas worth exploring for they have proven effective in different areas of the country and in different types of groups and activities, and carry years of experience in the hands of those in this committee.

We hope that after trying some of these ideas and making them your own, that you will share with us any outcome, either positive or negative, in order to allow us to complete or adjust this document for the benefit of everyone involved.

If you have any questions, comments, have more marketing ideas or would like to receive a PDF version of this document, please be sure to communicate with us via the email address provided below. We are here to help you in any way we can.

How can a local club grow its membership? First ask yourself, “Why did I join? If the conditions that met your answer still exist they should attract other members. Most people join iris societies for the following four reasons:

1. Information
2. Sources
3. Socialization
4. Pride

Information: This may be the key reason why many people come to their first iris society meeting. If visitors are presented with an informative, colorful program they may come back to another meeting.

Meetings:

- Schedule regular meetings. Make your calendar known so that people can schedule themselves to attend in advance.
- A rule of thumb is to schedule a good speaker or great program within **30 days** of an event, like a sale or a show where you might pick up new members. If you wait too long, the curiosity wanes. That first meeting is the club’s first impression; make it a good one.
- Hold most meetings in public places: libraries, garden centers, botanical gardens, community centers, nature centers, etc. Places that are already drawing plant people may get accidental members, and a new person may feel uneasy going to a private home.
- Garden meetings are a great way to enjoy the garden and to actually see irises in cultivation. Garden meetings can be used to describe iris culture; to explain plant parts; to give iris grooming lessons; to showcase SDB, BB, Japanese, Siberian or other iris species; to identify weeds; and to provide judge’s training.

Speakers:

- **Bring in outside speakers.** Fresh views from outside the club stimulate interest. Often knowledge of particular iris categories can be lacking in a local organization, and an expert on something new can offer new challenges and opportunities.
- **Utilize member expertise.** All iris culture is local. Everyone knows a given iris performs differently in different parts of the country. Your members are experts on performance in their garden. We come together as a club to share this expertise. We all learn from each other.

Partnerships:

- Partner with the local botanical garden to offer a course on growing irises or a workshop on dividing and planting.
- Create an informational booth at your local Regional or National Flower Show or Home & Garden Show. These are often provided either free or low-cost to non-profit plant societies. An iris club could gather scores of members at a strongly worked booth.

- Provide information on your society to local nurseries and garden supply stores. Most stores are happy to leave your information on the counter for pickup by customers.

Sources: Often people come to clubs looking for particular irises or types of irises.

Until the internet became available, joining societies was one of the best ways to discover places to buy iris; but don't sell the old ways short. The advice and council of local clubs means a lot to someone who has never before ordered from a supplier. Not only do people hope and expect that local club members will share knowledge and plants, they also appreciate great deals, like auctions and sales.

- **Prizes:** Encourage plant door prizes, swaps, and giveaways at meetings.
- **Group Orders:** Think about group orders on bulbs and other plants that one member might order a quantity at wholesale prices and split the order.
- **Plant Auctions:** Have an auction of purchased and donated plants. These can be both public and private (members only) .
- **Sales:** Have an iris rhizome sale; it not only raises money, but brings people and irises together.
- **Iris Incentives:** Giving an iris with a club membership, or a couple of irises with an AIS membership, usually can get many people to join. If we provide something good for our members they will then continue to renew and be active. The new color *Basic Iris Culture* booklet is a \$5.00 value. Clubs can order a quantity and make a profit or use it as a perk of joining.

Socialization: Some gardeners tend to be shy. We may relate to plants easier than to people. Like walking a dog, carrying a plant for show and tell can break the ice. Most people develop relationships they treasure in clubs, but this happens with time. Although a great asset, the first response from people is usually, " I do not want to get involved." If we do things in a structured way the pressure is removed.

New Member Welcome:

- Ask an outgoing person in the club to be the official greeter and make sure that any new member is welcomed and introduced to another member.
- Find out something about the new member. How did he hear about the club? Does he grow irises already? What does he like about irises? If you learn the interests of the new member you may discover he or she has expertise in an area that could help the club. Emphasize how they could contribute their talents and information.

Community Outreach: Clubs should consider how they relate to their communities.

- Is anyone in the club involved with other garden clubs? Does anyone give talks on irises? Working with garden clubs is often helpful for clubs wanting to develop a Design portion of the annual Iris Show.
- Is there a beautification project in the city that could use our help? This is a great way to use excess iris rhizomes from our gardens and draw attention to iris culture.

- Do we interact with master gardener programs or university extension? We might have someone who could teach them about irises, or we may learn some things from them about controlling pests and disease.
- Could the club help a horticulture student at a nearby college with a partial or full scholarship?
- Farmers Markets are a great place to have a sale and educate at the same time.

Social Media: Using social media can not only help recruit more members, it gives you the opportunity to share information about their own iris gardens, to share pictures and growing tips, and to share announcements and upcoming events.

- If you are on Facebook, “Like” the AIS Facebook, The Iris Encyclopedia, and Join World of Irises, the Blog of The American Iris Society. The more friends there are the more friends there will be. Share what has been posted on your local club’s Facebook Page.
- Post announcements about upcoming events on your social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. Ask your friends to re-tweet or Like your post, thereby spreading your information to their networks. You may generate interest from iris newbies that you can help get started on their iris hobby.
- Start a Facebook Page for your local iris society. Let everyone know, and be sure to post photos, calendar items, chat about irises, and let everyone have an opportunity to share local growing information. Encourage posting of whose irises bloom first, new irises people have seen, culture tips, irises for trade, etc. This interchange encourages iris friendships beyond the monthly iris meetings.

Pride: Even though in excess it is one of the seven deadly sins, pride can add a great deal to clubs. We all like to show off our best efforts, individually and collectively.

Shows: Have at least one iris show each year. Some clubs have three to catch all the types of irises.

- Shows provide a venue to meet interested people. Always have invitations to join available or, better yet, take their membership then and there.
- Be sure to have a sign up list at the show or sale asking for contact information (e-mail/phone) to alert customers about the next iris event or next year’s sale.
- Post pictures of your show on the Show Calendar in the Iris Encyclopedia.
- Be sure you have a design class at your show and use the state of national garden club judges as part of the panel. You reach a whole different area of garden interest and may gain some members.

Garden Tours: We all like to show off our garden when it looks good, but the public seems to love seeing irises growing almost as much! Having an Iris Garden Tour is a great way to introduce the public to irises, and to inspire them to grow their own. Some Club members take orders during the tour, and dig and deliver the rhizomes at the Annual Sale, to increase Sale revenues. At the very least, the garden tours are a great way to let attendees know about the club and provide membership information in hopes of signing up new members.

Judges training: Learning and acknowledging expertise makes us feel good about our knowledge, and serves our Region and the AIS. Even if attendees do not become judges, they will learn a lot about what to look for in a well-grown iris, as well as learn what judges actually look for when judging an iris.

Awards: Honor your members with service awards, local garden awards, local show awards. Many members love competing for Queen of the Show. And there's nothing like a certificate to say, "Thank you."

Promotion: There are many ways to promote irises, your club, and the AIS at little to no cost.

- Newspapers: Can you afford an ad in a local newspaper for advertising an event? If not, check out some of the free offerings, particularly the Announcements and Calendar items, which are often free. If possible, contact the local newspaper for a story around bloom time. Pictures of iris gardens and stories on the local iris-growing community are interesting to readers. Contact the Living or Garden editors to inquire.
- Television: You may be able to book an iris club member as a guest on a local interview show, or garden program. Look at the public access channels for more opportunities. Be sure to submit garden pictures if the weather segment features local photography.
- Radio: Often radio stations appreciate an articulate spokesperson who can talk about local irises. And upcoming events are often welcome as a public service announcement, which stations must offer as part of their license agreements.
- Websites: If your local club or region has a website be sure to use it to announce events. Also, local newspapers often have an online version, and devote space to upcoming events and announcements.
- Posters: Most local businesses allow posters for events in their front windows. All you need to do is ask! Post on grocery bulletin boards and other free spaces around town.

HAVE FUN: Unless you own a nursery, relax. This is a hobby, an interest, a passion. It shouldn't be a chore. Meetings should be fun, not a time for arguments or hard feelings. If everyone participates then no one will be overworked or feel left out of the fun. Friends who garden are friends forever!



Some Helpful Online Sources of Information

- American Iris Society
www.irises.org
- Iris Encyclopedia
www.wiki.irises.org/Bin
- AIS Facebook
www.facebook.com/theamericanirissociety
- World of Irises – the Blog of The American Iris Society
www.theamericanirissociety.blogspot.com
- Twitter
@TweetAIS
- AIS Storefront Shopping Cart (order Basic Iris Culture)
http://irises.org/Member_Services/AIS_Storefront.html
- AIS Tool box (templates for iris show schedules, Design Class idea, etc.)
http://irises.org/Member_Services/AIS_Toolbox.html
- AIS Presentations (slide and digital)
http://irises.org/Member_Services/Presentations/AIS_Presentations.html
- YouTube (View How-to Design and Create Presentations, Use Programs)
<http://www.youtube.com>
- Lynda.com (Learn How-To Use Photoshop, Paypal, Twitter, Aperture, \$\$\$)
<http://www.lynda.com>
- UNCG (Univ. of N. Carolina – How to Sell at Farmer’s Markets)
http://greenleaf.uncg.edu/farmermarkets_farmers.html
- Apple’s APP Store (Download Photo Tools, Keynote, Pages for low fees)
<http://www.apple.com/mac/app-store/>