

The Guardian Gardener's Handbook: The Watch List

What is the GG Watch List?

We will use this list to keep an eye on irises that are not in the first tier of Guardian Gardens qualification for the reasons explained below. People who want to participate in the GG program, but who are not very experienced with iris growing, can be particularly useful in growing Watch List irises to help ensure that they don't slip—or slip back—into obscurity.

“Graduates” of the GG Program

Irises that have been in the program for several years will, we hope, have increased in population enough that they're no longer on the edge of extinction. Using our GG formula of Commercial Source numbers and HIPS Databank numbers (see “What is Rare?” elsewhere in this handbook), any iris *already in the program* will go into the Watch List when its rating numbers, added together, total 10 or higher. A good example is ‘Tid-Bit’ (G. Sturtevant, 1925), which was adopted into the program at the beginning, in 2014, as a 0-4 iris. Now it's up to five vendors and seven HIPS gardeners. Add 5 and 7 and you get 12, so ‘Tid-Bit’ can now safely go on the Watch List. We love that!

Irises that didn't fit into the program: 0-5 through 0-9

These irises don't qualify to go into the GG program when we first analyze them. Our criterion, remember, is *no more than two Commercial Sources and no more than four HIPS growers, a rating of 2-4 at most*. The 0-5 and 0-6 irises, or indeed, any iris where the first number is zero and the second number is a single digit, are arguably at least as endangered as an iris that is being sold by two nurseries and is in four HIPS gardens. We know that's a weakness in the formula. Rather than opening that can of worms (i.e. revising the formula, which would take endless discussion), we're placing those irises on the Watch List. An example of this is ‘South Pacific’ (K. Smith, 1954), which when first analyzed was a 0-6. It's still there, because it never went into the program. Now that it's on the Watch List, we are confident that its numbers will increase. This is much better than waiting for it to slip below the threshold numbers of 2-4.

Irises that don't fit into the program because they're not yet historic

Time, you will have noticed, marches on, and every year another batch of irises qualifies as *historic* according to the official HIPS definition. That designation of 30 years old or older has been debated since the beginning of HIPS, and so much time has been spent on that debate (not to mention effort and tempers), that we all now realize it's best to leave it alone and work with it.

However, a great many irises that are 25 to 30 years old are very rare already

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and may have disappeared by the time they reach 30. While we can't justify including ever more recent years, we feel this group can safely be put on the Watch List, so we haven't lost them by the time they qualify. Twenty-five years is long enough to be considered the test of time. A good example here is the lovely Japanese iris 'Raspberry Glow' (Aitken, 1992). We don't have good statistics compiled about it, but when I looked for it for sale online, I found no sources; even the breeder no longer offers it. Onto the Watch List with it!

The GG Watch List is new and is a work in progress. We will modify this section of the handbook as we learn to use the list effectively.

Where to find it: Refer to "Contacts & Useful Links" elsewhere in this handbook.