

PG Award for Excellence



Phyllis Pierrepoint (centre) receives the first Prairie Garden Award for Excellence

Phyllis Pierrepoint: Always a Winner First Prairie Garden Award for Excellence

This material is a portion of that provided in nomination of Phyllis Pierrepoint as the first recipient of the Prairie Garden Award for Excellence.

The Prairie Garden Committee received several nominations. All were reviewed by an appointed board and Phyllis was declared the worthy recipient of the \$1,000.00 prize and a silver tray. A generous donor made this award possible.

Phyllis (Provins) Pierrepoint was raised on a fertile farm in the Swan River Valley where she learned early the pleasure and value of a garden.

Phyllis began developing her "study and teach" approach to horticulture when she was a young schoolteacher. She encouraged her students to learn about trees by participating with them in planting and tending a variety of trees and shrubs.

In 1945, Phyllis married Ernie Pierrepoint, who also had an interest in horticulture. The Pierrepoints established a home and had two daughters. Their garden and yard were carefully planned, landscaped and stocked with an interesting variety of trees, shrubs and flowers. Ernie became an early president of the Bowsman Horticultural Society. After just 17 years of marriage, Phyllis was widowed and assumed actively farming the half-section of land where she and her daughters continued to reside and where Phyllis still lives. Shortly after her husband's death Phyllis became president of the Bowsman Horticultural Society, and she has chaired that organization many times over!

Phyllis became aware of the interdependence of animals, plants and birds and that this interdependence is related to topography, natural waterways and soil types. She has preserved 55 acres of virgin forest on her farm. Farming was Phyllis' life-long work, but gardening has been her passion.

Never satisfied to plant just the essentials, Phyllis has experimented with different hybrids of the old standard varieties of vegetables, herbs, annual and perennial flowers, fruits, trees, and most of all **lilies**. Planting and care were never the main objective, only the beginning. Phyllis has always carefully recorded, compared, studied and used the results of her experiments. A long list of varieties has passed under her scrutiny. Over the years she has worked with hundreds of hybrids, checking and recording details of insect resistance, hardiness, suitability to the soil in her garden and days to maturity. Where applicable, she recorded freezing quality and flavour of her harvest.

She has cultivated 35 varieties of potatoes: white, red, purple and gold, all carefully tested for size, shape and disease resistance, quality of baking, boiling, frying and soup making. Corn, in 32 varieties has grown in her garden and been scrutinized for height, days to maturity, flavour, colour and tenderness. Peas have been studied for mildew resistance, production, flavour and tenderness, and freezing quality.

Beans - string and stringless, and beans for drying - have been grown, cooked and tasted for quality. Many types of carrots were grown and checked for resistance to insects and disease, shape, colour and flavour. Tomatoes have been grown and catalogued for disease resistance, first bloom, first fruit and length of fruit production. Colour, shape, size, skin quality, tenderness and sweetness have been compared and recorded.

Large assortments of herbs have also always been part of her garden: grown and used fresh, dried and mixed for different uses in cooking. Many varieties of pumpkin, squash and cucumbers were grown and tested.

Perennials and annual flowers are not above serious study where Phyllis is concerned. She has grown them from roots, bulbs, corms, rhizomes and seeds: testing varieties suggested for Zones 2 to 5. Hardiness, suitability for growing in different locations, quality of bloom, and usefulness as cut flowers has been considered. For several years Phyllis cared for test gardens for the University of Manitoba, working with Professor Louis Lenz.

Apple and crabapple trees underwent Phyllis' scrutiny and over the years she has tested 10 varieties for productivity and suitability for local conditions. She checked the fruit for taste and texture, eating, baking, freezing, drying, as well as for keeping quality. She did the same with several types of plums, cherries, raspberries, currants, gooseberries and strawberries.

In 1947 Phyllis planted her first lily bulb. Her love of lilies grew, as did her "patch," to the point where she had literally thousands of blooms. She grew lilies from seed resulting from her own crosses. She won prizes with some of the unique and lovely shades at local shows: the Canadian Prairie Lily Show, the Manitoba Regional Lily Show, and the North American Lily Show.

As a member of the local Tree Planters Association, Phyllis Pierrepont researched the merits of different trees for use in shelter belts, and drove the tractor that pulled the planter for local shelter belt planting.

Feeling that her lack of knowledge limited her efficiency, in the 1960s Phyllis enrolled in the General Horticultural correspondence course from the University of Guelph. Her studies afforded her with an understanding of such things as the composition of her garden soil with its high pH, new ideas in landscaping, and planning and designs for home grounds. This also enabled Phyllis to teach evening courses in Swan River, for the Department of Education, and to assist many of her students with their landscaping plans.

Individuals and organizations have benefited from Phyllis Pierrepont's knowledge and from her gardens. Local 4-H Club members have been given lily bulbs and seed potatoes for their garden plots. Numerous other organizations have been the recipients of both bulk and packaged/named choice bulbs. She has hosted "Open Garden Tours" to share her knowledge and her beautiful displays of lilies with anyone who was interested.

Phyllis is highly respected among her Manitoba Horticulture Association (MHA) friends and fellow gardeners. She has been a long time member, past president and regional director of the association, representing horticultural societies as far north as Flin Flon and The Pas where she became known as "Friend to the North." She visited all of the societies in her region to talk on gardening topics or judge at their shows.

She has demonstrated her interest in encouraging horticulture by managing the Manitoba Horticultural Societies Award Fund. The Bowsman Horticultural Society first proposed this scholarship for deserving students at the University of Manitoba and Phyllis has been instrumental in encouraging societies and individuals to sustain this fund. In 1995 the MHS Award Fund became a standing committee of the MHA and Phyllis continues to serve on this committee.

As a Manitoba Horticulture Association judge, Phyllis has instructed at many horticultural judges' schools. She has been much in demand as a judge for home grounds, 4-H gardens, and grasses, fruits, flowers and vegetables at exhibitions and horticultural shows in many Manitoba towns.

Knowledge and firsthand experience have always led Phyllis to share information in writing and by giving talks. She has spoken to horticultural societies from Winnipeg to Thompson on soils, companion planting, growing, exhibiting, vegetables, flowers and lilies. Phyllis has written articles for **Grain News**, various Canadian Lily Society newsletters, **The Prairie Garden**, and in the 1998 North American Lily Society yearbook. Phyllis herself was featured in an article in the January issue of **Gardens West, Prairie Edition**. Phyllis Pierrepont has received honorary life memberships in the Canadian Prairie Lily Association, Manitoba Horticultural Association, Benito Horticultural Society and Bowsman Horticultural Society.

Such award-winning contribution has come from Phyllis Pierrepont's unending willingness to share her extensive knowledge and understanding of everything horticultural on the prairies and parkland. She has quietly, patiently, laboriously but happily spent her years studying, planting, watching, experimenting, recording and enjoying all growing things in her garden; but never just for herself.