

## A family affair

**QUESTION:** What's a good family hobby that fits in with school holidays and can be moved around the country?

Tokoroa's Miller family says growing daffodils is a pretty good answer.

Dad Graeme planted his first bulbs at age 14. His wife Faith adopted the hobby when they married. Their children - Miriam, 12, Karlyn, 10, Kirsten, 7 - were given their own bulbs at age three. And it won't be too long before one-year-old Iain joins in.

Growing and showing is a way of life the children have grown up with. Miriam used to stun Graeme's fellow exhibitors when at two-and-a-half, she could correctly identify and say the names of miniature species *cyclamineus* and *canaliculatus*. Karlyn was four when she showed her first daffodils and Kirsten attended her first show at six weeks old. They're now too experienced to enter in the novice section at shows (which is limited to two years' exhibiting) and participate in the amateur section.

The sisters say that one of the best things about showing daffodils is winning.

Miriam won the Premier Miniature vase with 'Sundial' at the Northern Daffodil Club show in 1995 and Karlyn won the Premier Children's Bloom at the same show, with 'Suffragette'. There have been many other placings over the years and prizes are frequently bulbs, which helps to encourage their interest.

The family traces the interest in daffodils back to Graeme's grandfather, Robert McCheyne Miller, who was founding patron and life member of the National Chrysanthemum Society and life member of the National Daffodil Society.

"My father gave me nine mixed daffodil bulbs when I was 14 and I planted them under a phebaliun hedge. When they grew, one was good enough to show so I entered it in the Wellsford Show and got first prize. It was the first time I had entered a competition. That hooked me in."

Graeme continued daffodil growing and showing through high school, teachers' college and while teaching in his home town of Wellsford. When he got his first principal's job at a school "in the back blocks of Taranaki," among the possessions he took with him were 200 bulbs of 30 varieties, which he grew for pleasure. That continued until after Graeme and Faith were married.

Faith, already a keen gardener, felt Graeme spent so much time fussing over his bulbs that he might as well start showing them again. So at the beginning of 1984 Graeme bought \$100 worth of named bulbs from Hamilton daffodil breeder Peter Ramsay.

Now the family has about 8000,

# Good Gardeners



including 500 miniatures. Half are seedlings they've bred themselves.

The children's involvement stemmed from an ulterior motive on the part of their parents. "We gave the girls their own bulbs to keep them out of ours. They were always wanting to help us," Graeme says.

Shows have taken the family all over the country, usually for about four weekends in a row at the peak of the season.

Each time they compete, the girls take several blooms each while their parents take up to 150 for a national show.

The Millers have been in Tokoroa for six years. Four years ago they bought a double section on the outskirts of town, built a house on one and developed large daffodil beds on the other. Each year the girls are allowed to choose one bulb each to add to their own collections. That means they watch closely during the flowering season before making their choice.

Graeme's teaching career has taken the family and their daffodils all over New Zealand, including Lismore, Okato, Apiti (where the flowers were covered in snow one year) and now Tokoroa. And the best place to grow daffodils, according to Graeme, is Okato, Taranaki, where the climate and soil conditions were just right.

"We have never managed to get some varieties back to the size we had them in Okato," he says.

*Story by Alison Kay*

TOP: The daffodil growing Miller sisters: Karlyn (left), Miriam (centre) and Kirsten. (Photo by Kirby Wright.)

## Beauty at the beach

IT began with a tiny red arctotis which wasn't doing very well just inside Ted and Doreen Fugill's gate. Doreen took it across the road and planted it on a sandy bank above the waterline at Kuaotunu Beach. With plenty of space for its roots the plant flourished and the Fugills' beach beautification project began.

Now, almost twenty years later, the beach garden covers about half an acre and includes lilies, freesias and a range of other "bits and bulbs". But the main feature is the arctotis which is at its best in September and October. At one time Doreen had about 22 different arctotis colours, but the area has taken a beating from vandals over the years and the colour range has reduced to about 12.

Nonetheless it makes a spectacular sight in full bloom and Doreen knows of people who travel to Kuaotunu especially to see the flowers on the beach.

Ted and Doreen have enjoyed the Coromandel Peninsula for 40 years. Ted was a bushman in Rotorua and the pair used to travel by Morris Minor to their bach in Whitianga which was also where Doreen's parents lived. It was a long trip over some rough roads, but the couple loved the area and when back problems forced early retirement on Ted 23 years ago, they bought an old house at Kuaotunu.

Ted took on the rural delivery run to Opito till it was extended from three to six days a week and gradually they upgraded their home. Doreen developed a half acre garden around the house.

"I've had a garden since I was a kid. I've always liked gardening. I originally wanted the arctotis to hang over a bank at the front of the section but it had nothing to put its roots in. It did much better on the beach, especially the red one. Now it's all over the district."

Doreen has collected arctotis cuttings from all over the country, often asking strangers if she could take a piece from their plants. She remembers getting one from a petrol station in Auckland - after first asking for a cutting.

RIGHT: When at their peak the arctotis flowers attract visitors from near and far. (Photos by Kirby Wright.)