

GRANT E. MITSCH-KING OF AMERICAN DAFFODIL HYBRIDISTS

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In 1925 George A. Mitsch and family migrated to Brownsville, Oregon, from Kansas, prompted by repeated crop failures in the Sunflower State. One member of this family was a teen-aged youth named Grant.

Soon after settling in Oregon, Grant embarked on a career of gladiolus breeding and commercial glad growing. In both he was successful, and established a reputation for business integrity and production of high quality bulbs. He introduced several fine glads of his own raising, then, at the peak of his success with glads, he discovered daffodils.

By 1934 he had acquired a collection of daffodils and made his first cross. His initial collection included some popular varieties and a few novelties. King Alfred, Beersheba, John Evelyn, Kandahar, Aerolite, Killigrew, Fortune, and others were the nucleus of his breeding collection. Studious by nature, he surrounded himself with all the daffodil publications he could lay his hands on. Through study and experience the value of good breeding stock was recognized. As fast as his purse would permit, the best known varieties were collected.

Finding their Brownsville acreage too small for the expanding bulb enterprise, the Mitschs moved to Lebanon, Oregon, in the late '30's and hybridizing was continued. While only two varieties, Cream Cup and Silverdale, were introduced from Lebanon, the genesis of many of his earlier varieties occurred there.

Meanwhile, seedlings were coming on. Probably the best of his earliest introductions are Silverdale and Gold Crown. Demand for both of these has been brisk, and he was obliged to withdraw Silverdale from his price list this year to increase the stock. Gold Crown, a smooth *2b* with sharply contrasting perianth and crown, is highly regarded in southern California.

Linn and Santiam, the first of a series of excellent garden flowers from John Evelyn x Fortune, were offered in 1947, followed later by Chinook, Pinwheel, Lebanon, Flying Saucer, and Jest. Cibola, a large, rich golden flower from Malvern Gold x Trenoon, appeared in 1951. In addition to its intrinsic beauty, it is extremely early. The same year gave us Lemon Drops. Coming from Fortune x *triandrus albus*, it sports two or three pendent lemon blooms to a stem.

Three outstanding flowers were among the 1952 introductions, Ardour, Festivity, and Sacajawea. Probably the most famous of these is Festivity, a flawless *2b*. Ardour, a bright-cupped *3a*, has its beauty enhanced by pearly gray anthers, instead of the usual yellow. Sacajawea, a Fortune-

type flower with orange-red rimmed cup, opens several days earlier than its famous parent.

While living in the Brownsville-Lebanon area, two important events occurred in Grant's life. He married his wife, Amy, and made the acquaintance of his staunch friend, Matthew Foulds. It was here, also, that the Mitschs' two lovely daughters were born.

Firm in the belief that their Lebanon property was safe from natural disasters, the Mitschs awoke one winter morning after an all-night down-pour to find their fields flooded by the swollen Santiam River. Having no desire to start a bullfrog farm, and disappointed in its value for bulb growing, they commenced to look for property better suited to their needs. Eventually their present place at Canby, Oregon, was purchased.

"Daffodil Haven" is near the Willamette River, at least 100 feet above the highest water level. With Ol' Man River held safely at bay by this reassuring elevation, stocks were moved from Lebanon and hybridizing resumed. No interruptions in the hybridizing program was caused by the two moves, since they were accomplished in off seasons. Seedling production had accelerated until by 1951 six or seven new varieties were introduced annually from that year onward.

The year 1953 witnessed the debut of the latest of all the 1*a*'s—Late Sun, and Radiation. One of the best of the older pinks for breeding, Radiation often imparts lavender tones to the cups of its seedlings. Highlight of the 1954 season was the introduction of Luna Moth, the first of a long line of King of the North x Content seedlings.

Nineteen fifty-five was another banner year in which three fine flowers were introduced: 3*b* Bithynia, which enjoyed the top spot in the American Daffodil Symposium for several years; Lunar Sea, considered by many the finest 1*d* extant, and Paricutin, a peerless 2*a* for color and substance, especially if grown in a cool, moist climate.

Coloratura, the first of the famous series from Green Island x Chinese White, came along in 1956, as did Madrigal, from the opposite cross of the same parents. All flowers introduced in 1957 were exceptionally good. Rima, a great advance in pink trumpets, may have the most promising future. Demand for Flamingo is far ahead of the supply of bulbs. Caro Nome also deserves mention, since it is the first of the shallow-crowned pinks.

By 1958 the roster had increased to nine introductions. Of these, Air-castle has probably won the most recognition. It won a "Best-in-Show" at London in 1963. No more need be said! Bethany, the first result of crossing his 1*d* seedlings with Binkie, has won numerous awards around the country. Another fine 1*a* in Alchemy was 1959's contribution. Oratorio, a tall, striking 2*b* from Polindra x Green Island, also was offered in 1959.

Daydream, winner of an award of merit in England, is probably the

prize of 1960. A sister to Bethany, many believe it even better than that fine flower. Leonaine, with its lavender band midway of the cup, is a departure from the usual pink color pattern. The year 1961 saw the emergence of Accent, the first pink flower which could boast of calla lily substance in its perianth. Allurement, Limeade and Precedent are other very good flowers from the same year.

Somewhere along the line, Grant became interested in crossing standard flowers with the minatures and species. Mr. Foulds may have kindled that interest, or maybe like Topsy, it "jest growed". The delightful results of these crosses were named for small birds: Bushtit, Chickadee, Kinglet and Vireo in 1961, Bunting and Dickcissel in 1964. Doubtless there will be more offered in the near future. One exception from the bird series was named Satellite. A seedling of Rouge x *N. cyclamineus*, it is one of the best, having a most highly colored cup for a cyclamineus hybrid.

Ten flowers were introduced in 1962, all so good that a choice among them is difficult. Special mention is merited by Abalone, Chemawa, Gay Mood, Melody Lane and Prologue. This latter should find its way into many Southern gardens, since it is possibly the earliest of all the 1b's. Consistent high quality describes the varieties for 1963.

Although none of the 1964 flowers are as yet grown by the writer, they were observed at the Mitschs' last spring and favorites were established. They are Bit O' Gold, Bobolink, Honeybird, Noweta, Quivira, Silken Sails and Wings of Song. Admirers of the "little fellows" will never be completely happy until they have Bunting and Dickcissel growing in their gardens.

A book could be written about the desirable qualities of the flowers Grant has raised. Each one has one or more notable features and each is beautiful in its own right. It is possible in this article to mention only a few. Many that were omitted are fully as deserving.

Grant's work could be likened to a combination salad of Englehart, P. D. Williams, Guy Wilson, Lionel Richardson, Brodie, and Alec Gray, garnished with a dash of Clark, Radcliff, Brown and Lewis. He has worked to produce new flowers for the pleasure of everyone—gardeners, breeders, fanciers and exhibitors. True, a few flowers did not measure up to expectations, but Grant would be the last to claim a perfect record.

Much credit is due his charming wife, Amy, who has worked by his side these many years, relieving him of tasks which interfere with his work in the flowers.

A religious man who lives as he believes, Grant is honest, kindly, modest and generous. He pursues and enjoys all of the finer things life has to offer.

This is the man who has given us so many exciting new daffodils, and who is destined to give us many more in the future.