

Jan de Graaff, Tamer of the Wild Lily, Dies at 86

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Jan de Graaff, a horticulturist whose hybridization of lilies helped make them a favorite garden flower, died of Parkinson's disease Saturday at his home in Manhattan. He was 86 years old.

Mr. de Graaff was in the vanguard of those who propagate lilies commercially. Previously the plants were considered delicate and temperamental, requiring special conditions and exotic planting methods.

"By dint of rigorous mass hybridization, de Graaff managed to ruin the lily's reputation as an impossible, unobliging garden aristocrat and made of the lily a good, easy-growing garden plant," wrote Patti Hagan in *Horticulture*, the American gardening journal. *Taming of the Lily*

Before Mr. de Graaff's efforts, lilies were mostly dug in the wild and transplanted in the gardens of Europe and the United States. Some survived, grown by a small group of amateur fanciers who shared seeds and lore.

Mr. de Graaff began his first lily experiments in 1938 at the Oregon Bulb Farms, which he owned in Gresham, Ore. He set out on a program of hybridization for beauty, hardiness and ease of growing.

Finally, in 1941, he produced *Enchantment*, a hot-coral lily with erect flowers and petals that unfurled gently from its speckled throat.

"The most famous hybrid lily of all time," *Horticulture* called it. "There is more *Enchantment* grown than all other lilies in the world." While Mr. de Graaff produced many more varieties of spectacular lilies, this made his fortune and reputation. *Family in Bulb Business*

He was born in Leiden, the Netherlands, into a family that had been in the wholesale bulb business since 1723. With the family's help, he bought the Oregon Bulb Farms in 1934. In World War II, when imports were scarce, Mr. de Graaff became one of this country's premier producers of daffodil and tulip bulbs.

In 1962 he received the American Home Achievement Medal for outstanding work in horticulture, as determined by the presidents of all the national horticultural organizations. He sold his business in 1968 and moved to Manhattan.

Mr. de Graaff wrote "The New Book of Lilies," published in 1951 by M. Barrows & Company Inc., and was a co-author of two other books on the plants.

Surviving are his wife, Peggy; a son, Alfred, of Paris; a daughter, Joan, of St. Thomas, the Virgin Islands, and two sisters, Frances, of Philadelphia, and Cilia de la Court of Doorn, the Netherlands.