

BEAUSEJOUR DAYLILY GARDENS

by Carol Bender

Carol Bender is a Master Gardener, and Coordinator of the Beausejour Daylily Gardens in Beausejour, Manitoba.

Whatever you have planned for this summer, be sure to include a trip to the second American Hemerocallis Society (AHS) Display Garden on the Canadian Prairies located in Beausejour, Manitoba, an easy 30 minute drive from Winnipeg.

According to the AHS, the purpose of a display garden is to showcase modern daylilies and demonstrate their use in low maintenance landscapes. Gardens that earn the AHS designation must include a wide variety of daylilies – old and new; full, round, spiders, miniature and large-flowered – representing several hybridizers and presented in a well-maintained setting with each cultivar labelled.

Daylilies are drought tolerant, low maintenance, pest and rodent resistant plants. They bloom over a long period of time and the plants increase in size each year. They range in height from 30 to 122 cm (1 to 4') tall; bloom early, mid or late season. The flowers come in every colour except blue, from miniatures to 23 cm (9") diameter show-offs with ruffled edges. There are over 55,000 registered cultivars.

The park grew from the vision of Richard and Sandra Kisiloski, who gave the town an acre to be used for greenspace. The town matched it, and Linda Wilke drew up the plans. Workers from Milner Ridge and the town laid 100 tons of Tyndall stone, and hauled 1,529 cu.m (2,000 cu.yds.) of topsoil for 929 sq.m (10,000 sq.ft.) of flowerbeds. We planted Prairie Sky Poplar and Amur Maple trees for shelter; 300 cedars in raised beds around the perimeter. The vision was taking shape. The summer of 2002 was hot, dry and windy. By spring of 2003, the cedars stood as brittle, brown reminders of harsh conditions.

Linda Stilkowski's article entitled "Garden Revolution" (Nov. 2002, Winnipeg Free Press) was the inspiration for the Beausejour Daylily Gardens. The article



Garden Angels identify volunteers and the section they help maintain.

Photo by Carol Bender

was about the first American Hemerocallis Society (AHS) Display Garden on the Canadian Prairies created by Janice Dehod, and many volunteers from the Canadian Prairie Daylily Society, at Assiniboine Park in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

If the first AHS garden was in Winnipeg, why couldn't the second be in Beausejour? Driven by perennial optimism, I contacted Janice Dehod. I explained that we had no money, little knowledge and the perfect location to prove the benefits of modern daylilies. Talk about an easy conversion! A few friends armed with slides from the AHS met with the town council and proposed a daylily display garden with a goal of AHS designation by 2005.

We thought of daylilies as pioneer plants that came up every spring as stubbornly as bishop's goutweed and dandelions. We met with Hugh Penwarden. He had used daylilies to change the high maintenance gardens of Riding Mountain National Park into less demanding, eco-friendly gardens. We came home full of ideas and optimism. Our first plants were planted in June of 2003.

In August a visit with Patrick Healey confirmed how little we knew, but taught us what was possible. By the end of 2003 the park had 150 daylily cultivars, 85 different iris, dozens of peonies and lots of open space. It takes a lot of plants to fill 929 sq.m (10,000 sq.ft.) of flowerbeds. We had no money for stopgap annuals and every weed in the province was trying to help out. A 12 m (40') diameter circular bed was planted with sunflowers, which not only gave a gorgeous display, but also sheltered a Japanese Ivory Silk Lilac during its first winter.

Each plant had to be marked to be sure we could find it in the spring; know the colour and height to expect and not mistake it for a weed. We went to garage sales in search of old Venetian blinds for temporary markers. We learned that permanent ink isn't permanent; and aluminum slats are better than plastic. We learned metal markers large enough to include the plant's name, height, colour and hybridiser's name were beyond our budget. My husband solved the problem by stamping the information into the metal from a pop can, then fashioning a stand from a metal clothes hanger. He has since recycled a couple thousand pop tins and metal hangers, and probably rues the day he came up with the idea.

We placed stakes at 3 m (10') intervals along the back of the flowerbeds. The plants in each 3 m (10') section were charted, and entered in a database allowing us to monitor the colour scheme, track blooming patterns, identify bare spots and recognize plants if the markers were lost.

The year 2004 was cold, and wet. At first glance, the new park looked like a garden of shiny markers. April showers came, continued and flooded

into May. Then it snowed. Hundreds of plants huddled in pots on our patio didn't get planted until June. Finally, in mid-June, the 249 Beausejour Air Cadets and their parents came to the rescue. They joined the other volunteers to weed, and to plant trees and flowers. The cadets planted 300 lilac saplings to create a living snow fence, and then planted sunflower seeds on either side to shelter the young lilacs.

AHS designation in 2005 was a challenge. It was May 29th and still too wet to weed or plant. All the peonies along the centre walkway were removed June 1st so the arbour piers could be poured the next week. Local craftsmen built the Tyndall stone pillars and metal arches that span the centre flowerbed. The push was on so the beds would look good before the North American Lily Society tours in July. The Beausejour Daylily Gardens received AHS designation in 2005. Today the garden features over 500 daylily cultivars, plus lilies, iris, peonies, ornamental shrubs, prairie hardy fruit trees (including dwarf cherries), and memory/celebration plantings.

Perhaps the greatest benefit has been the "Garden Angel Program." The angels adopt sections of the gardens and maintain them to AHS display garden standards. Each section has a folk art sign with its number and the name of the angel looking after it. Our first angel was the 249 Beausejour Squadron Air Cadets. They have been joined by the Prairie Roots Garden Club, the Beautification Committee, St. Mary Catholic Womens League, the First Beausejour Scouting Group and two dozen others. All angels receive free horticulture therapy.

This is a community park and we invite all visitors to sign in and add their comments to the register contained in the country mailbox. Bring a picnic lunch. Ice cream is available just two doors away.

The Beausejour Daylily Display Garden is the first stop on the Gardens, Parks and Treasures Poker Derby an annual fundraiser that also promotes our community. Imagine, tourism, hort-therapy and a windfall all in the same day!



Carol Shields Memorial Labyrinth – Update

www.carolshieldslabyrinth.ca

We are looking forward to starting construction on this garden commemoration in King's Park, Winnipeg, MB in the spring of 2007. It will be 45.7 x 45.7 m (150 x 150') and will include a healing/meditation garden, reading circles and a commemorative centre for community and family celebrations.