



## A Lifetime of Lilies

Fred Fellner has lived on his farm near Vermilion, AB for 68 years now, in an area noted for its cold, late spring frosts and long harsh winters. Born in 1931, he was a full time grain and cattle farmer until 2003 when he retired and took to lily breeding full time. This quiet, unassuming man breeds some of the finest Asiatic lilies in the world, despite many challenges over the years.

Many notable and world-renowned lily growers have been inspired by Fred, including former NALS President, the late Gene Fox who once said after visiting his fields 'What an inspiration to continue with lilies.' Fred was also the recipient of the NALS E. H. Wilson Award in 1995, a prestigious award given to people noted for their contributions to the genus *Lilium*. Fred has said to me often over the past few years 'The best is yet to come'. Obviously, Julius Wadekamper from the US felt the same as far back as 1978, when he first introduced a number of Fred's hybrids in his Borbeleta catalog, saying 'these are hardy and vigorous lilies of exquisite beauty.' Mr. Wadekamper is also quoted as saying 'It seems the Fellner lilies like good wine, get better as time goes on.' I can't help but wonder what Mr. Wadekamper would say today if he could see what Fred has accomplished!

Fred developed an interest in lilies back in the late Sixties, helped along by another well-known lily breeder named Robert Simonet. Fred realized early that he could build upon the genetics found in Simonet's seedlings, providing himself with a lifetime of hybridizing. There are 45 lilies in the RHS Lily Registry with Fred's name attached to them, and that data is only accurate to 2005. There are a few more that have been registered since, and more yet of great garden lilies in circulation which were never registered. Never too hasty, it can be 6 to 12 years before he makes a decision to register a lily.

Fred breeds for hardiness, disease resistance, high bud counts and fade resistant color. In his own words 'Beauty is much easier to come by, compared to the attainment of disease tolerance.' In his climate, Mother Nature lends a helping hand and culls those that do not measure up, resulting in the hardiest Botrytis resistant selections. As for bud counts – well, his lilies have always been known for this feature, and over the past 40-50 years they have certainly increased. In his breeding field this summer of 2008, I saw hundreds of stems with 40-60 buds each! There are roughly 30,000 seedlings growing there, with 8000 -10,000 new planted each spring. 3<sup>rd</sup> year seedlings are culled each Autumn after he selects any that meet his requirements in breeder stock, as well as a few to evaluate further for registration.

Shrewd gardeners are wise to purchase his mixed lilies as they are the culls from his program each season, and can expect delightful surprises when they begin to bloom. Over the years, his mix has become more and more popular, to the point where customers who have purchased them before are now requesting doubles of the bulbs in each bag - it was hard to convince them that they are all unique and 2 bulbs of the same variety are a rarity in his mix! For a sampling of some of the lilies coming from his fields over the past 10 years, please visit <http://plantlilies.ca/album/v/eval/fellner/>

You might want to bookmark that page, we haven't added the new selections from 2007-08 yet and oh my, they are simply stunning. The advancement has been the greatest these past 2 years, and as he is fond of saying THE BEST IS YET TO COME!

Lynnette Westfall (Plantlilies.com)