

Once again, the beauty of lilies graces our landscape. The word lily is used to identify a number of different flowers. By no means am I a lily expert; however, over recent years my enthusiasm and admiration for this group of flowers has grown significantly, and I owe it all to Bob Smith.



Six or seven years ago, as Rita and I drove to visit our daughter Cassandra, whose home was near Eagle, Nebraska, roughly fifteen miles east of Lincoln on US Highway 6, we left the interstate at Waverly and drove south on 148th Street to link up with Highway 6. Approximately four miles south of Waverly, we passed through a small community called Prairie Home. While slowing down, we spotted a homemade



sign on the side of the road announcing: Turn Here - Lilies for Sale. Being the plant lovers that we are, we turned. One block east, we arrived at the home of Bob and Beverly Smith. Their acreage was ablaze with hundreds of blooming day lilies and assorted Asiatic lilies.

As we stepped out of our car, Bob greeted us, “Hi, my name is Bob Smith. Welcome to our home.” With a big warm smile on his sun-weathered face and a friendly firm handshake, I instantly knew I would like that guy.

Having exchanged greetings, Bob graciously took us on a tour of their beautiful yard. As we walked and visited, I soon discovered that Bob was not only a self-taught,

knowledgeable, talented botanist but also an extremely patient man. He personally had hybridized most of the lilies and other plants for sale in his yard.



An hour or two later, we left Bob's and continued our journey to Cassandra's, the back of our car filled with beautiful lilies. Since that day, whenever we are near his home, we usually stop. Each time we renew our friendship and always leave, adding to our plant collection.

To create a new hybrid, one needs to cross-pollinate flowers, then wait for seeds to develop and mature. The seeds are collected, planted, and again —more waiting. Much later, if one is fortunate, the new plants begin to bloom. If the results are pleasing, more time is needed. The new hybrids must grow large enough to be divided. Finally, the mature hybrid can be divided resulting in each new division being genetically the same. This process can take years.



A few days ago, Rita and I were once again in Bob's neighborhood, so we stopped. Like the first time we were there, his lilies were blooming.

I asked Bob if I might interview him. I wanted to know more.



He graciously obliged. I discovered that, by trade, Bob had been a professional welder and an operations supervisor on a pipeline for many years. Bob started hybridizing plants about seventeen years ago. It was then his wife Beverly, known for years by the locals as *the flower lady*, introduced him to the late Allan Ensminger of

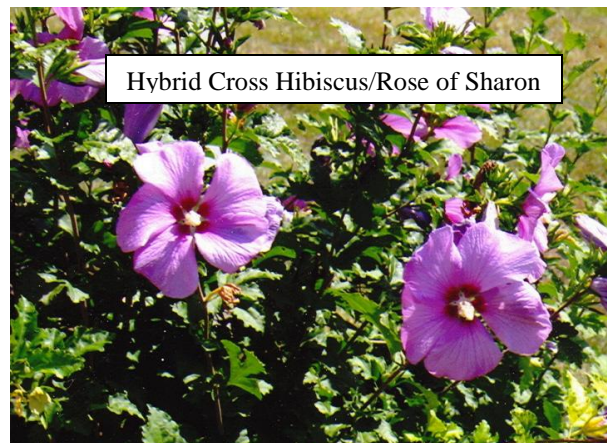
Lincoln, a man well known for his iris hybridizing skills. Ensminger's work captured Bob's attention and soon he, too, became involved. Together Bob and Beverly began developing new cultivars of iris. Their work soon expanded to working with lilies, hibiscus, and Rose of Sharon.



Bob lost his beloved Beverly to cancer in February of 2010, but he continues their work. He informed me that he recently created and submitted a new cultivar of iris, which he named *Beverly Ann*, to the American Iris Society. I saw a picture of it. It has beautiful yellow-gold standards with burgundy-black falls trimmed in yellow-gold.

Bob certainly exemplifies the saying, "Patience is virtue." For example, after developing over twenty thousand hybrid seedlings of a certain plant, perhaps only four or five might have the potential to be great plants. That to me is being more than patient.

Bob is very proud of his current accomplishment. He has successfully crossed hibiscus with Rose of Sharon, a task even the experts said could not be done. Today, Bob is well known within the industry and by many professionals. He is regarded as a highly skilled hybridizer; to his friends and family, he is simply *the flower man*.



If your future road trips ever place you in Bob's vicinity, I encourage you to stop by, especially when his iris, his lilies, his hibiscus or his Rose of Sharon are blooming. You will be glad you did.

Perhaps I should change the beginning of this story. I should have started, "Once again, the beauty of Bob Smith's lilies graces our landscape."