

She occupies a special place in my heart. Not being able to celebrate Mother's Day with her just six days ago, not being able to celebrate her birthday only sixteen days ago, that special place in my heart has awakened. Furthermore, with Memorial Day looming in the horizon, I can't help but find myself frequently thinking of Mother.

I owe my love for gardening to her. As an impassioned and accomplished gardener herself, I've often wondered what she would think of me today. She died the year before I became a certified Nebraska Master Gardener and five years before I began working for Buffalo County Extension. Although aware of my passion for gardening, she never knew of my career choice in horticulture. I'm saddened knowing she never had the opportunity to read just one of my columns. However, on the other hand, you as a reader probably know over the years, I've referenced her in my column numerous times.

When asked, most gardeners admit to having a favorite flower. I recall Mother saying that her favorite flower was whatever was blooming in her yard at the time, but I knew her absolute favorite was the bearded iris. Being the passionate gardener that she was, it was most apparent she truly loved spring flowers such as columbine, peonies and woodland phlox. Because of her, bearded iris, columbine, peony and woodland phlox can be found growing in our flower borders.



The other day, while Rita and I were perusing our flower borders, my eyes affixed on our beautiful woodland phlox. The sight of them caused me to think of Mother. How well I remember years ago assisting her as we prepared for Memorial Day. The evening prior, we would cut an assortment of spring flowers. It seemed like woodland phlox along with iris,

columbine and peonies were always a part of those arrangements. Early the next morning we would complete the arrangements and deliver them to the cemeteries.

Woodland phlox, also called timber phlox, is scientifically titled *Phlox divaricata*. This particular species of phlox is actually a wildflower often found growing naturally along streams and in open woods. Woodland phlox forms large colonies over time as its leafy shoots spread along the ground rooting at the nodes. Although spreading, it is certainly not invasive. Small in stature, it reaches a height of only twelve inches and forms clumps of delicate one and one-half inch lavender to soft pink fragrant flowers that attract butterflies and hummingbirds. It's an ideal choice for the border of a shade garden or naturalized at the base of large trees. Woodland phlox prefers moist, humus-rich, well-drained soil and high open shade yet accepts sunny conditions if adequately watered. In the heat of summer, woodland phlox often goes dormant.



As one can see from my attached photos, our woodland phlox has a beautiful, ethereal look. Unfortunately, this lovely spring bloomer lasts only for a few short weeks; then, it retreats from sight for the balance of the year.

While our woodland phlox continues to bloom, it's safe to say that Mother holds that special place in my heart.

As it has been for the past eighteen years, since Mother's death, Rita and I will again make our journey to Sutton, Nebraska, on Memorial Day to deliver flowers to those same graves that I visited with mother so many years ago. I can assure you, if by then, our woodland phlox is still in bloom, a sprig of it will be placed on Mother's grave. Otherwise, we will rely on potted flowering plants —after all, as mother often said, "My favorite flower is whatever is in bloom at the time."