



THE PRIDE OF THE PRAIRIES

The Beausejour Daylily Gardens offer a place of peace and beauty to locals and tourists alike **by Carol Bender, Beausejour, Man.**

Back in 2002, Fred Kazina, the former mayor of Beausejour, envisioned a park that would enrich our community and play an important part in the town's first participation in the Communities in Bloom competition. Local residents Richard and Sandra Kisiloski donated one acre from their farm and the town purchased an additional adjacent acre to create the park.

Work began, but unfortunately the summer of 2002 was hot, dry and windy. There was no shelter, no shade and no well, so progress on the park stalled.

Then I read an article in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, which became the inspiration for what is now the Beausejour Daylily Gardens. The piece was about a woman named Janice Dehod and the volunteers who created the first American Hemerocallis Society (AHS) display garden on the Prairies.

Driven by perennial optimism, I contacted Janice Dehod, explaining that while we had no money and little knowledge, we did have the perfect location to showcase the benefits of modern daylilies. And so we gained the support of the Friends of the Assiniboine Park Conservatory.

We began as a bunch of friends and fellow gardeners determined to turn a stalled project into a world-

class AHS display garden. It would instill community pride and make Beausejour a tourist destination. Luckily, we didn't know anything about daylilies or the challenges that faced us in a Zone 2b climate (which is very cold).

My next contact was Hugh Penwarden, head gardener at Riding Mountain National Park. The original plantings consisted mainly of annuals with full-time staff growing tens of thousands of annuals in glass greenhouses. Hugh had substituted perennials, including daylilies, and organic maintenance to reduce the cost of labour, materials, water and chemicals—and he was willing to help.

Our merry band of naïve volunteers became known as the Friends of the Daylily Gardens. We were determined to receive the AHS designation in three years. This means the display garden must showcase about 200 daylily cultivars from several hybridizers, and include all types of daylilies. Labels must show the name, height and colour of each cultivar, and identify the hybridizer. The garden must be well maintained, pass an annual inspection and be open to the public.

After three years of hard work, the gardens received American and Canadian Display Garden status in 2005. It

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Clockwise from left: the gardens at sunset; an Indian love call daylily; Audrey (third from the left) and other garden angels; an Easter morn lily.

is designated as a Zone 2b community AHS Display Garden—the coldest on the planet.

Over the years, thanks to many volunteers, gardeners and craftsmen, additions such as a lawn checkerboard, benches and rubber stepping stones made from recycled tires have been added. The picnic site was hard surfaced and improved. It now contains two checkerboards and is used for fitness classes, concerts, workshops and weddings.

The gardens couldn't survive without our "garden angels," the volunteers who adopt sections and maintain them to AHS standards. Each section has a hand-painted wooden angel with the section number and name of its angel on it. The signs are not for sale and are given only to garden angels themselves. Each spring, one of those angels, Audrey, who is also a master painter, spruces up the wooden angels with the help of other artistic volunteers.

The gardens continue to be a real testing ground for plants and gardeners. After a year in our 2b climate, new plants and trees may not look like they do in the glossy brochures, and the gardens are constantly threatened by every kind of disease and pest, including jackrabbits that eat the tips off the cherry trees.

However, the gardens are also teaching us patience and are a place for meditation and appreciation of our world and the people in it. We have shared laughter and tears, and gone for solitary walkabouts to recharge and marvel at the changing beauty. Sadly, my husband passed away in the summer of 2006, and I like others, have found the gardens to be a place of peace and purpose. There is nothing like watching geese circle in the autumn, following killdeers leading you away from their eggs or sharing the excitement of schoolchildren as they plant cherry tomatoes or discover ant colonies.

Today, the gardens showcase nearly 700 daylily cultivars, thousands of iris, peonies, lilies and ornamental shrubs and trees. We expect 6,000 visitors this year and invite all to sign in and add their comments to the register.

The AHS gardens enrich the lives of all of us; there is such a feeling of pride when people realize what a treasure we have in our community.

Head to our website, www.beausejourdaylilygardens.com, for updates. ■

