

Plant Raisers' Award

Terrance (Terry) Edward Dowdeswell



Fig. 1 Terry Dowdeswell (left) being presented with his 2016 Plant Raisers' medal by Keith Hammett (right), President of the RNZIH. Photo: Murray Dawson.

One has only to enter the name "Delphinium" into a search engine, to realise that Terry (Fig. 1) has established himself as the world's preeminent breeder of the genus today.

Terry was born in Nottingham, England in 1948. Immediately after leaving school he worked briefly in the plant nursery industry, before emigrating to New Zealand with his parents in 1965. For the first seven years he had various office jobs in both Auckland and Christchurch. These gave him a variety of business skills.

From 1972 he worked in the livestock industry (pigs), before joining his father in 1975 to grow tomatoes in East Tamaki. In 1982 he and his wife started growing chrysanthemums in Tuakau until both realised they were allergic to the plant. This led them to explore other flower crops and the importation of high quality *Delphinium* seed from England in 1985. Such was his progress that he staged spectacular displays at the Ellerslie Flower Shows held in Auckland in 1994 and 1995. The 1995 display deservedly won a Gold Medal.

In 1999 Terry moved his operation to Whanganui, and I well remember him saying that there was nothing he could do in Auckland, that he was unable to do in Whanganui.

The seed that Terry imported was elite material with a long and distinguished history in the UK, where it was an

important component of herbaceous borders and as a show flower. Whilst new *Delphinium* cultivars were raised by seed, propagation of them was traditionally vegetative. Cuttings were taken from stools, which meant that building up stocks of named clonal cultivars for dissemination and sale was a slow process.

The breakthrough that has made Terry the number one source of quality delphiniums in the world today is that he has developed distinct seed strains. Seed is so much easier to disseminate than plants.

Terry has given his seed lines a series name and each are the result of hand-crosses between two selected *Delphinium cultorum* parents grown in his stock beds. Terry bred these parents by using the original seed from England (crosses between named cultivars), and crossing the progeny across lines, selfing, back-crossing and introducing further germplasm.

Whilst the majority of sales are for his seed line series, Terry also offers cultivars that he has raised and propagated for sale from cuttings – these include *D.* 'Ice Block', *D.* 'Martha D' and *D.* 'Ruffles' to name but a few.

In any serious breeding programme it is essential to clearly define specific long-term objectives. Terry has done this and has developed seed series for use as garden plants, for cut flower production and more recently compact types suitable for pot plants. For each he established firm selection criteria (see below).

His dedication and perseverance have been rewarded by worldwide sales and two major international awards. His Dusky Maidens Series (Fig. 2) won the Perennial Plant of the Year award of the International Hardy Plant Union in 2008, following trials held in Sweden. That same year, the Royal Horticultural Society (UK) bestowed an Award of Garden Merit on Terry's Sweethearts Series (Fig. 3) following trials at Wisley, in the UK.



Fig. 2 Dusky Maidens Series. Photo: Dowdeswell's Delphiniums Ltd, www.delphinium.co.nz.



Fig. 3 Sweethearts Series. Photo: Dowdeswell's Delphiniums Ltd, www.delphinium.co.nz.

Whilst the 2016 RNZIH Plant Raisers' Award is made in the name of Terry for his Dusky Maidens and Sweethearts Series, it is important to recognise that Janice, Terry's wife has brought computer and business skills to make a formidable team.

Citation prepared by Keith Hammett

Dowdeswell's Delphiniums Ltd Breeding Division: Breeding for seed grown selections

Aims: To breed new and innovative delphinium selections for the home garden, cut flower and potted plant trade. To be able to offer several series with different attributes in all three categories, all marketed under the name "New Millennium Delphiniums".

1. Garden plants

1.1 Attributes:

- Strong root system
- Strong stems
- Long inflorescence in proportion to total height
- Disease resistance
- Good colour saturation
- Double florets ... and
- Single florets
- Long life

1.2 Current selections of *Delphinium cultorum*:

- Black Eyed Angel Series (white with dark bees¹; Fig. 4)
- Black-Eyed Sailors Series (blues with black bees)
- Blue Lace Series (light blue double with pink tinge; Fig. 5)
- Cobalt Dreams Series (new 2013) (even mid to deep blue with white bees; Fig. 6)
- Double Innocence Series (double whites; Fig. 7)
- Dusky Maidens Series (pinks with brown bees)
- Fallen Angels Series (white with black bees)
- Green Twist Series (white with green or cream flashes; Fig. 8)
- Innocence Series (pure white with white bees)
- Lilac Ladies Series (deep mauve with white bees; Fig. 9)

- Morning Lights Series (blue/mauve with white bees)
- Pagan Purples Series (purple doubles; Fig. 10)
- Pink Blush Series (soft coral pink double often with a green tinge; Fig. 11)
- Pink Punch Series (very deep mulberry pinks; Fig. 12)
- Purple Passion Series (rich purple with white bees; Fig. 13)
- Royal Aspirations Series (mix of blues with white bees; Fig. 14)
- Sunny Skies Series (light blue with white bees; Fig. 15), developing further
- Sweethearts Series (RHS AGM 2008) (pinks with white bees)

1.3 Selections under development:

- Mottles and picotees
- Several medium height selections
- Short selections for pot production
- Perfumed selections

1.4 Future breeding directions:

- To develop more colours, shorter delphiniums and perfumed delphiniums and a combination of all those attributes
- To maintain strength and vigour in the plants we develop
- To take advantage of unusual traits as they appear
- To continue to breed for disease resistance
- Aim to provide one new selection per annum
- Look for new series

2. Cut flower delphiniums

2.1 Attributes:

- Strong root system
- Strong stems
- Long inflorescence in proportion to total height
- Disease resistance
- Good colour saturation
- Double florets ... and
- Single florets
- Maximum production of flower stems over 18 month period
- Fast regrowth to subsequent flowering

2.2 Current selections of *Delphinium cultorum*:

The following selections have good acceptance as cut flowers. They are the same variety names as for garden plants but use special crosses:

- Green Twist Series
- Lilac Ladies Series
- Pagan Purples Series
- Pink Blush Series
- Purple Passion Series
- Royal Aspirations Series
- Sweethearts Series

2.3 Selections on test:

Investigating many crosses with our faster, more prolific, thin stemmed selections.

2.4 Future breeding directions:

- To develop more colours, about 1.2 m stems, thinner strong stems, faster time to flower from seed, greater production of stems, double flowers, dark stems as well as light ones, perfume and a combination of all those attributes
- To maintain strength and vigour in the plants we develop

¹ The "bee" in delphinium flowers refers to a central arrangement of smaller petals of often contrasting colour. When fuzzy and brown they resemble the insect for which they are named after.

- To take advantage of unusual traits as they appear
- To continue to breed for disease resistance
- Aim to provide one new selection per annum
- Look for new series

3. Potted or dwarf delphiniums

3.1 Attributes:

- Strong root system
- Stems sufficiently strong enough to hold flower spike erect when in flower
- Long inflorescence in proportion to total height
- Disease resistance
- Good colour saturation
- Particularly clean foliage
- Double florets ... or
- Single florets

- Short flower spikes (ideally no more than 50 cm)
- Fast from seed to flower
- Fast regrowth from pinching
- Bushy growth habit

3.2 Current selections of *Delphinium cultorum*:

- New Millennium Dwarf Stars – a dwarf mix

3.3 Selections awaiting bulking up of parent stock:

- Dwarf Pink Blush Series
- Dwarf Pink Punch Series
- Dwarf Purple Series

3.4 Selections under development:

- White selections
- Deep blues
- Mauves
- Double selections
- Single selections

3.5 Future breeding directions:

- To develop more colours, responsiveness to growth regulators, 50 cm stems with $\frac{1}{2}$ of their length in flowers, strong stems, faster time to flower from seed, greater production of stems, bushy habit when pinched, double flowers, dark stems as well as light ones, perfume and a combination of all those attributes
- To maintain strength and vigour in the plants we develop
- To take advantage of unusual traits as they appear
- To continue to breed for disease resistance

Other delphiniums raised by Dowdeswell's Delphiniums.

Photos: www.delphinium.co.nz

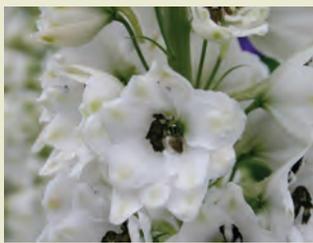


Fig. 4 Black Eyed Angel Series.



Fig. 7 Double Innocence Series.



Fig. 10 Pagan Purples Series.



Fig. 13 Purple Passion Series.



Fig. 5 Blue Lace Series.



Fig. 8 Green Twist Series.



Fig. 11 Pink Blush Series.



Fig. 14 Royal Aspirations Series.



Fig. 6 Cobalt Dreams Series.



Fig. 9 Lilac Ladies Series.



Fig. 12 Pink Punch Series.



Fig. 15 Sunny Skies Series.