

## Muriel Constance Davison



Muriel Davison, photographed in her garden by Dr Keith Hammett.

Muriel Davison loves to garden on a grand scale, as anyone who has visited the family property at Wyndham in Southland will have realised. Muriel started the garden from scratch, snatching spare moments when she could from the demands of the newly purchased dairy farm in 1966 to plant a tree here, a group of perennials there. Money was tight, so much so that to begin with there was only enough finance for one spade and it seemed to be constantly needed by husband Bob for digging holes for fence posts.

When at last there were two spades Muriel started with the steeply contoured paddock that sits below the house, planting the first of the numerous Japanese maples which have thrived and provided the inspiration for the garden name of 'Maple Glen'. Paths wind back and forth in a delightful fashion. These follow the old trails made by sheep which proved to have figured the

most logical way of negotiating the banks – when Muriel tried a different route for the paths she soon realised that the animals knew the best way to negotiate the steep terrain.

As well as the maples the spaces between the paths began to be filled up with rhododendrons, camellias, magnolias, callunas and ceanothus. Shaded areas became home for hostas, crocus, wood anemones, snowdrops, colchicums and cyclamen, often planted in bold groups and with an artist's eye, as anyone who has seen the drifts of snowdrops beneath white trunked birches in early spring will testify.

The windswept site made for slow growth to begin with, but once the shelterbelt plantings became established and provided protection from the south-west winds the rate of growth increased remarkably.

When the first of the ponds were dug out by machinery Muriel embarked on a new style of gardening, planting the moist edges with plants which love the conditions such as astilbes which today grow in vast drifts, making a spectacular sight in summer. Moisture loving irises thrive here as do filipendulas, trolius and ligularias.

Nowadays there is a spectacular series of ponds winding their way down the valley, the new ones excavated by son Rob who bought himself a digger so he could carry on landscaping in the grand manner.

When Muriel started the garden she soon discovered the joys of plant

propagation. This was a blessing in more ways than one. It enabled her to have a plentiful supply of plants on hand whenever inspiration for new plantings struck and of course they were free, enabling her to create mass plantings of considerable artistry without budgetary concerns.

The rapid success of the nursery, which still operates today and has a mouth-watering list of hard to get perennials and bulbs, enabled Muriel and Bob to move on from the demands of seven days a week dairy farming to the relatively more relaxed lifestyle of grazing sheep and nursery work. Not that it's relaxing by most people's standards I suspect, for the days are long and productive, with seldom a break for morning or afternoon tea, and son Rob who does so much in the garden nowadays is often heard mowing the extensive grass paths well after dark during the busy lambing season, the headlamps of his mower sweeping back and forth on the winding paths and illuminating the richly varied tree trunks in dramatic fashion.

Today 'Maple Glen' is a masterpiece of a garden, covering forty two acres (17 ha). It's a rich repository of plants which attracts visitors from all corners of New Zealand and from around the globe, making Muriel a most fitting recipient of the award of Associate of Honour.

**Citation prepared by  
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Scenes from Maple Glen gardens, courtesy of [www.mapleglen.co.nz](http://www.mapleglen.co.nz)