

DROUGHT-TOLERANT BEAUTIES | FRAGRANT CLEMATIS

Horticulture

The Summer Garden



DAYLILY
DELIGHTS

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Display until September 12, 2011

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\$5.99

Jack and Jo Roberson are like peas and carrots—good in their own right, but paired together they're even better! Through their plant breeding and marketing efforts this husband-and-wife team continues to make a significant contribution to the horticultural world.

Though they grew up in neighboring towns, Jack and Jo didn't meet until college, Oklahoma State University. Jo graduated with a bachelor's degree in speech pathology; Jack, a doctorate in veterinary medicine. (He is still practicing part-time at a local clinic.) They married soon after graduation and moved to Texas, where they unexpectedly established American Daylily & Perennials, a mail-order retail and wholesale company.

Jack was intrigued by plants at an early age. He was frustrated when he couldn't find a four-leaf clover while everyone else could. When he did find one, he wanted to know how it came to have four leaves, not three. Jack would read anything that he could get his hands on about plants. First it was African violets, next it was ferns. When he got to daylilies he couldn't get past them. Thus came his "aha moment" in life.

Presented with an opportunity to buy an old daylily nursery in Texas, Jack told Jo it was an offer too good to refuse. Their business grew and in time they had to make a choice: buy more land outside of Houston or move the entire business. They'd always planned on retiring to Missouri to be closer to family, and so they decided to go ahead and relocate everything to the Kansas City area.


Just like every married couple, the Robersons have encountered ups and downs. From the business perspective, once they each focused on what they did best, things really started to gel. A turning point for their company came in 1994, when Jack's 'Black Eyed Stella' was chosen as the first All-American Daylily, an award that recognizes *Hemerocallis* selections that have excelled in trials across the country (see [.org\). This milestone allowed the Robersons to turn Jack's passion into a full-time profession. As the saying goes, behind every good man is an even better woman, and Jack is the first to note that Jo has helped every step of the way—taking care of the kids, creating spectacularly savvy marketing for his plant creations and planting and digging field of plants.](http://daylilyresearch</p>
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While Jack continued to breed and introduce new daylilies, including 'Miss Mary Mary', a 2005 All-American Daylily, and 'Lady Elizabeth', a 2011 winner, his breeding work also stretched into other genera. He currently holds patents and trademarks on more than 60 plants and groups of plants, including the Liberty series of cannas and the Story Book series of garden roses.

Although lantanas have been a long-time garden favorite, there had been no real breeding work in the genus for more than 15 years when Jack began working with them. His Patriot Series brought about an entirely new and diverse palette of colors, and five different growth habits, including weeping, upright and petite.

Jack is also the breeder behind the Spirit series of cleomes, an exclusive line for the Proven Winners brand.

Jack's version of the old-fashioned spider flower brings new consistency to size and form as well as pastel colors and a never-before-seen royal purple. Typical cleomes stand a lanky five or six feet tall, whereas the Spirit cultivars are self-branching, compact plants just over two feet tall.

This year marks the Robersons' 45th wedding anniversary and the 35th anniversary of their company. When asked what their greatest work has been to date, without hesitation Jo responds, "Our children and grandchildren." She says teaching proper values to their kids always mattered most to them; it's clear that family comes first to her and Jack. "That's what's most important," Jo says. "The rest simply fills the day." 

Plant Breeders Jack & Jo Roberson

by MARIA ZAMPINI ~ photograph by AL PARRISH

