



Dr. Phillip Gardner, S.M.A.

T.A. Stewart Memorial Award, 1992

Dr. Phillip Gardner of New Zealand was awarded this high honour for 1992

From a very early age Phil exhibited a very keen interest in plants, particularly in the recognition and identification of New Zealand natives.

On leaving school he joined the Forest Service and attended University part-time in pursuit of a science degree majoring in botany, his studies were interrupted however when he was recalled home to manage the family farm on the death of his father. As a result of this course of action he began his lifelong work in horticulture and the establishment of Avenue Nurseries which has become in the intervening years the foremost rose nursery in New Zealand and its name synonymous with 'Quality Roses'.

During his early years in business he obtained the agency for a number of eminent overseas hybridists and formed strong links with the Rose Society which have been maintained through the years. To bring to the attention of the rosarians the best of the new cultivars he commenced setting up trade displays at shows and the policy was firmly established to stage these displays at as many shows as possible throughout New Zealand and this has continued to the present day.

After a number of years spent expanding this nursery Phil returned to his university studies completing a Master of Science where he did research on the proliferation problem which had been bothering nurseries with their young budded roses. It is never easy to pick up the academic life after a long spell away, but this he managed to do very successfully, at the same time continuing to manage the nursery.

During the 1960's the quality of roses sold throughout New Zealand declined dramatically. In many cases blooms lost clarity of colour and had become flecked and distorted, petal texture had become thin and papery and leaves patterned or blotchy yellow. This was largely due to a build up of viruses and virus-like agents within the roses. Phil recognising and paying heed to the problems initiated work to do something about it, and it was in this capacity that he made his greatest contribution to roses in New Zealand. He obtained through selection the cleanest and healthiest mother stock possible of each variety he sold and the quality of this 'High Health' material is now well known throughout the country.

Supported by a D.S.I.R. research grant Phil undertook research on rose viruses and the development of quick and accurate methods for identification for this work he was successful in obtaining a PhD.

In 1981 Phil left the rose business in the capable hands of his son, Willie and is following yet another path in horticulture that of developing and growing sub-tropical fruits at his new home in Northland. He still maintains a keen interest in roses and acts in a consultative basis to the rose trade.

One may conjecture what the state of roses would be now in New Zealand but for the work of this man and all rose lovers everywhere value highly the contribution he has made.