

The Water Garden World Loses a Legend

The world of water gardeners lost a great friend with the July 12th death of Dr. Clyde Ikins. A charter member of the International Water Lily Society, Clyde was the owner of Lakeside Gardens, a wholesale water plant nursery out of Bandera, Texas.

Clyde had his first pond in 1939. From there, it just kept getting bigger and bigger. At one point in later years, he had one of the most complete water lily collections in the world.

His first plant love, however, was the Louisiana Iris. Clyde's involvement with that plant led him to become an accredited judge with the American Iris Society.



*Dr. Jerry Parsons and Dr. Clyde Ikins
at the dedication of Water Garden Gems'
The Dr. Clyde Ikins Learning Center
(This picture was taken on an outdoor stage)*

His professional experience before water lilies ranged from geology to biology to cattle breeding. The professional memberships and honorary awards are far too many to mention here. One unique claim to fame, however, was his involvement as Chairman of the Board of the Farm Credit Banks of Texas. In 1982, Clyde helped negotiate the sale of the Federal Land Bank's headquarters property in Houston. The sale price was the highest price ever paid at that time for Houston real estate, which was \$750 per square foot or \$32,670,000 per acre. He got into the water plant wholesale business when he retired after a very successful career in geology.

In 1981, Clyde and his wife, Bernice, moved to the Texas Hill Country near Bandera. On an 850-acre ranch complete with two spring-fed lakes, Lakeside Gardens was born as a wholesale water plant nursery. In addition to water lilies, over 2000 varieties of Irises were being grown. While Lakeside Gardens was the name of the business, he named the ranch itself El Rancho Encantado, which means The Enchanted Ranch. (Their previous ranch in west Texas was also called El Rancho Encantado.)

Clyde was a charter member of the International Water Lily Society. Due to his stature in the Louisiana Iris community, Clyde was asked to give an Iris presentation at the very first convention of the group, held in 1985 in Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania.

Years later, the International Water Lily Society recognized Clyde's contributions to the industry by inducting him into their Hall of Fame. (Note: The IWLS later changed to its name to the International Water Lily & Water Garden Society, or simply IWGS.) He was also inducted into the Texas Heroes of Horticulture, which is sponsored by The Texas Cooperative Extension of the Texas A&M University System. This honor is to recognize "friends who have devoted their life's work to telling others about the wonderful world of gardening." Dr. Jerry Parsons, with the Texas Cooperative Extension, likes to point out that Clyde was the very first person to get selected for inclusion while he/she was STILL ALIVE. "Dr. Ikins," Jerry says, "was so important that we didn't want to wait for him to die for that honor!"



N. Clyde Ikins
(Photo provided by Dr. Clyde Ikins)

Dr. Ikins' favorite water lily was, of course, the *N. Clyde Ikins*. His good friend, Dr. Kirk Strawn of Strawn Water Gardens in College Station, hybridized this hardy lily. Dr. Ikins loved to tell the story that he was visiting the Strawn's, and Dr. Strawn got this lily flower from the trash heap and showed it to Clyde. Dr. Strawn explained that it was a hybrid that he didn't like and was trashing it. Dr. Ikins says that he told Dr. Strawn that he thought it was a very pretty flower, and Dr. Strawn said not only would he go on and keep the plant, but also that he would

name it after Dr. Ikins. (This lily is today one of the biggest selling hardy lilies that Water Garden Gems carries.)

Dr. Strawn also hybridized a Louisiana Iris and named it after Dr. Ikins. In addition, there is a red hardy lily he hybridized and named after Dr. Ikins' wife, Bernice. (Dr. Ikins was preceded in death by Bernice.)

Dr. Ikins also hybridized some lilies and lotuses. This was mainly done as a hobby, and sadly he never took the time to register his plants. One tropical lily in particular was stunning with the depth of the color of the petals and stamen. Before he could continue with it to try to get it to propagate, the plant was unfortunately stolen.

Dr. Ikins and Bernice always loved to show off their beautiful gardens. From their ranch in west Texas full of cactus, Louisiana Iris, and water lilies to their ranch in Bandera full of Louisiana Iris and water lilies, they were famous for their hospitality. All types of organizations, from garden clubs to camera clubs to bird clubs, made the pilgrimage to Bandera. The International Water Lily Society held their annual meeting for 1992 in Houston. As a part of that event, they went by bus all the way from Houston to Bandera, which is about 450 miles one way, to visit El Rancho Encantado

Their property was truly a beautiful place to visit. From the hundreds of ponds for the wholesale business, combined with the numerous informal and formal display ponds all around their house, you could hardly wait to turn the corner to see what you would see next. .

In 2000, a local water garden club hosted Dr. Ikins in a new educational event held at the San Antonio Botanical Gardens called Water Garden Day. The weekend before, the local newspaper devoted two pages to Dr. Ikins and water gardens in general. As a result, there were over 125 people crammed into their seminar room that seats only 65. His presentation was, to say the least, spell binding!

Dr. Ikins' presentation featured, in part, a showing of slides from his massive slide collection of water lilies and water gardens. Thanks to the efforts of Duane Eaton and Dr. Jerry Parsons, that collection is now available on two web sites. (Through the many hours of the staff at the San Antonio Botanical Garden, Dr. Parsons had the entire slide collection digitized.) Duane has it on Victoria Adventure (www.victoria-adventure.org) and Dr. Parsons has it on his Plant Answers (www.plantanswers.com). For links to the actual pages on both web sites, you can email Duane at duanece@satx.rr.com.

A couple of years ago, Dr. Ikins shut down Lakeside Gardens, sold El Rancho Encantado, and moved to a retirement community in Georgetown, Texas, which is north of Austin. He was in rapidly declining health for much of the last year or so.

In 2003, Water Garden Gems dedicated our seminar room in Dr. Ikins' honor and named it The Dr. Clyde Ikins Learning Center. We were especially honored that Dr. Ikins attended the dedication. A year later, Lynn Warren, his assistant, said that was actually his last public appearance. Little did we know then!

The remaining pioneers of the water garden world are mostly now all in their 80's or above. Dr. Ikins' death marks yet another of our pioneers that has left us, but left us with an enduring legacy.