

GARDEN CELEBRITY . . . WHAT'S UP WITH THAT?

BY THE GARDEN CURMUDGEON

THE ORIGINAL Garden Curmudgeon and I are often quick to laugh at pretentious gardeners. At one NHS symposium, we were seated with enough egos to fill a huge AW Pottery vase, each gardener trying to out-pretense the next. "My garden is so beautiful," one gardener told a visiting lecturer, "that people cry when they see it." I was crying too, but because the OGC was kicking me in the shins from underneath the table.

What is it that makes gardeners seek fame? For surely they don't seek fortune. Even the most lucrative book contracts, speakers' fees, or nursery revenues are considered a fairly meager existence. No, it must be the fame that appeals to us, and fame-seekers are aplenty.

Fame comes in many shapes and sizes. Take, for example, the number of flower entries in the typical Puyallup Fair. Can you imagine winning a blue ribbon at the Puyallup Fair? It's something I've always wanted to do, as some competitive streak in me wants to crush the competition. But really, who is the competition? Some retired school teacher passionate about her tall sunflowers? An elderly gentleman who is proud of his dinner plate-sized dahlias? What, inside of me, wants to steal their blue ribbon? Because winning a blue ribbon at the Puyallup Fair is low on visibility and hype, but high in personal reward.

Then there are the awards that are high in visibility, like the gold medals from the Royal Horticultural Society's Chelsea Show. The great Christopher Lloyd has won a number of these gold



Christopher Lloyd's awards from the Royal Horticulture Society are thumb-tacked in his former chicken coop.

medals, and what does he do with them? They're thumb-tacked to the rafters of the chicken coop-turned checkout area in the Great Dixter nursery, an area that although it no longer hosts chickens, still smells vaguely of chicken poop. Mr. Lloyd is not a pretentious man.

We are fortunate in the Northwest to have dozens, if not hundreds, of talented gardening experts giving educational talks and demonstrations at nurseries, garden fairs, garden tours, and for non-profits like NHS. These appearances are often unpaid, and if you don't have a book or product to hawk, the only reason to do them is simply the fame. And anyone who has given a demonstration to an

audience for two in a room built for 250 knows how humbling public speaking can be. But yet people still want to become gardening experts.

I watched poor Ciscoe Morris try to take in the Northwest Flower and Garden Show last February and the man was accosted by well-wishers. "Ciscoe, I brought you candles in the shape of brussel sprouts!" "Ciscoe, here are some sea shells I picked up for you at the ocean!" "Ciscoe, I want to meet your new dog!" The poor man—surely the least pretentious celebrity gardener on the planet—was inundated with fans. Doesn't it seem that the

gardeners with the most reason to be pretentious are the most humble, and vice versa?

Perhaps it is our fault. Perhaps we idolize our garden heroes, following their every suggestion, watching their every talk, buying their every book, because it makes us feel like better gardeners. Or maybe it's because we've elevated gardening into a higher art form, higher than the fine

arts. And perhaps gardening is worthy of such high accolades, and celebrity gardeners worthy of our highest esteem.

But I doubt they're worth our tears. 🐔

The Garden Curmudgeon is an NHS member who prefers to remain anonymous.

