

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

4/1/2024

In Memoriam: David Lemon

Chris Beytes

David Lemon, one of our industry's most well-known and prolific flower breeders, passed away February 10 at the age of 89. Nicknamed "Marigold Man" by British gardener Christopher Lloyd, he could also be called "Pelargonium Man" or "Sweet Pea Man," said one writer.

Born in Dublin, Ireland, David began his horticultural training at the Dublin Botanical Garden, but he went to England for an honors diploma at the Royal Horticultural Society's garden at Wisley. He began his professional career in 1955, working at London's Watkins & Simpson seed company before moving to California in 1964. Settling in Lompoc, a hotbed of flower seed breeding and production, he developed new varieties for Burpee, Denholm, Ball, Bodger, Oglevee and its successor, Ecke Ranch.

He devoted himself to the French marigold for many years, introducing such series as Bonanza, Hero, Little Hero, Safari and Disco. His work was recognized in 1985 by All-America Selections with their Medallion of Honor award, and again in 2006 with their Breeders Cup award for his lifetime of breeding achievements. The varieties David bred in marigolds, geraniums and sweet peas set new standards for the classes. One of his marigolds, Showboat, was a Triple Crown winner, earning AAS, Fleuroselect and All-Britain Trials awards. He also served as AAS President in 1981 and 1982.

"This was nice to get this particular award, but I had some good teachers," he said of the honor. **GT**

(David's history courtesy of Pacific Horticulture magazine and the article "The Marigold in California" by Judith Taylor.)