

# Haist helps color the land with flowers

IVYLAND — Matt A. Haist, of 432 Hathoro Road, Ivyland, whose management efficiency and business expertise has earned him the reputation as one of the state's outstanding flower growers, has been named a Master Farmer for 1979.

Shopping centers and industrial parks, considered the trimmings of progress, have made most farmers "endangered species" in the Philadelphia area.

But Haist, a flower grower and greenhouse operator, is turning a "deaf ear" to urban sprawl. He continues to grow and sell a quarter-million pansies and

over 100,000 assorted flower and vegetable plants annually on his 18-acre farm.

While most farmers speak in terms of acres tilled, the new Master Farmer measures his production in square feet.

He grows pansies in a 75,000 square-foot area. Another 14,000 square feet are in greenhouses where he grows geraniums, poinsettias, chrysanthemums, bedding, hanging, and vegetable plants.

"Small acreage doesn't necessarily mean small business headaches," Haist notes. "It takes 23 cents of

every operating dollar to pay labor bills and another 32 cents to meet energy demands."

His high energy costs come from heating his five greenhouses. During the bitter cold spell in the winter of 1977-78, propane gas cost him \$700 per week. Labor costs have risen by 500 percent since 1950.

Flooding also has been a problem. There are four soil types on his 18 acres, including practically impregnable sandstone and yellow clay. Additional sod waterways have been constructed to help in draining the soil.

Over the past 25 years, Haist figures he has sold six inches of topsoil with the millions of flower packs he has marketed. After the plants are dug in the spring, he seeds a heavy cover of soybeans or sorghum as a green crop manure. This is rotatilled into the soil prior to transplanting the new pansy crop in the fall.

The pansy seeds are sown in beds during August and fledgling plants are transplanted to cold frames in October. Sashes are placed over the cold frames by Thanksgiving Day.

The remarkable pansy can freeze and thaw without apparent damage, but heat can be a menace. In February, the Master Farmer raises every second sash 2 to 3 inches to remove the heat.

As the temperature rises, sashes are raised further to increase ventilation. By mid-March, plants are ready for harvest. Crews dig fresh plants with trowels and fill the four-quart containers in the field.

Originally, Haist sold pansies wholesale to Boy Scout troops and other organizations for fund raising projects. Today, the entire crop is sold to retail outlets.

"My year's work used to be tied up in pansy production," he relates. "This was not a healthy situation financially because of a market collapse or unusual weather conditions. In 1989 I decided to expand volume and spread the risk by growing a variety of flowers."

In 1975, an operating partner, John Wilson, joined the business. He handles the greenhouse growing while Haist works outside with the pansies, a wide variety of



Matt Haist stays close to the earth on his 18 acre farm near Philadelphia. He is an intensive Master Farmer, raising over 100,000 assorted flowers and vegetables each year.

perennials, and chrysanthemums.

The Master Farmer culls his flowers carefully, saving the most colorful and compact pansies for seed. He painstakingly shakes out the seeds for the next year's crop and dries them in the sun.

He and his wife, Virginia, moved to the present farm in 1954. He originally farmed with his family in Philadelphia County. That farm is now "blotted out" by the cloverleaf at U.S. Route 1 and Woodhaven Road.

He has been an active leader of the Richboro 4-H Club, directing activities of 125 suburban youth. He also served as Northampton Township auditor, and was director, lion tamer, and program chairman of the Northampton Township Lions Club. Two years ago, the club named him "Person of the Year."

The Master Farmer has served as president of both the Bucks County Extension Committee and Bucks County 4-H Development Fund.

He was vice president and secretary of the Philadelphia Vegetable Growers Association. He also is a member of the Pennsylvania Flower Growers Association, Ohio Florists Association, Bedding Plants, Inc., and Pennsylvania Farmers' Association.

Haist is chairman of the Bucks County Vegetable Growers exhibit each year at the Farm Show. The

association exhibit has taken the statewide title 14 straight years.

The Haist have two children, Margo Ann, a law student at Suffolk University; and Randall, a senior at Lehigh University.

Three other Pennsylvania Master Farmers were named for 1979. They are Joseph R. Hartle, Jr., of R.D. 4, Bellefonte; Robert H. Hodge, of 1000 Thorndale Road, West Chester; and Geary W. Huntsberger, of R.D. 1, Eiters.

The program is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Farmer magazine and Cooperative Extension Service of the Pennsylvania State University.

Formal award ceremonies will be held January 8 at a special luncheon in Harrisburg. Haist will be inducted into the Pennsylvania Master Farmers' Association whose membership consists of all former award winners. The program was established in 1927.

## It's the Season for armchair gardening

NEWARK, Del. — Are you a gardener who's beginning to feel like a horticultural shut-in—deprived of outdoor activity as winter weather settles upon us?

If so, you can find some real gardening pleasure by turning to the world of garden literature. Here, within easy reach, are horticultural experiences of almost limitless variety, with appeal to every taste and specialty.

There are many sources of literature for the "armchair gardener," says University of Delaware extension garden specialist Dave Tatnall. For instance, your local public library should have on its shelves numerous books and periodicals on gardening, many of which you can take out on loan.

Bookstores and garden centers usually offer a good selection of garden books. Newsstands also often display popular magazines and paperbacks on the subject. And don't forget the garden pages of your daily newspaper.

If you're a member of a garden club or plant society, your benefits probably include an informative newsletter or bulletin and perhaps the opportunity to buy special publications—often at a discount.

Garden catalogues arriving at this time of year always make for interesting reading, too. Besides announcing the latest in plant varieties and garden

gadgets, many include helpful gardening tips and other basic information.

Another source of reading material which you should certainly not overlook is the Cooperative Extension Service. Your county extension office offers both state and U.S. Department of Agriculture fact sheets, pamphlets and other publications covering a wide range of garden subjects. The information is factual, unbiased and usually of garden subjects. What's more, they're all available at little or no cost.

Plan to enjoy some of your leisure time this winter reading a few well-chosen garden books and articles. It's sure to make your outdoor gardening more enjoyable as well.



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