

Chalk Up Another Win for Helen Miller, Lebanon's Flower Champ

BY KIMBERLY HERR

LEBANON — Guess who walked away from the Lebanon Flower Show with the best of show, sweepstakes honors and 15 blue ribbons?

It's no surprise. Of course, it was Helen Miller.

After all, since 1961, she has won best of show at the Lebanon show 15 times, sweepstakes, which means the most blue ribbons in all categories, 20 times, 363 blue ribbons and 176 red ribbons. She does not even bother to count ribbons that are not red or blue.

"As soon as the show is over, I start thinking about the next year," Helen said, and her planning pays off year after year.

This year, she won best of show with a "fancy leaf" begonia. The leaves, which are perfectly formed and have no signs of browning, measure about one foot in length.

It is a risky business, however, getting that one plant that will win awards. Helen raised three "fancy leaf" begonias, hoping that she would be able to enter one.

"You never know until the last minute what will be nice," Helen explained.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that flower and plant growing is luck, however. Helen will quickly correct you.

"People might think it's luck,"

Helen laughed, "but it's really a lot of hard work. People don't realize how much work there is."

For example, Helen's pet peeve when getting a plant ready for a show is cleanliness.

"I wash off every leaf," Helen said. "Then I dip it in soapy water and rinse it."

This is no small task when the number of leaves on one plant is considered.

Helen has no special training in flower arranging or horticulture, although she has read many books and has had much practice.

Her love for plants and flowers began when she was a little girl. She explained that she enjoyed going away as a child just so she could see other people's flowers.

She did not join the Lebanon Flower Club until the early 1960s, after she quit her job as a supervisor at J.C. Penney.

She explained that she decided to enter the flower show in the 1960s when she was looking at different exhibits and thought, "I have better than that at home."

"I decided I was going to take a chance," Helen said.

Helen was president of the Lebanon Flower Club in 1961.

Today, Helen's home at 1021 Quentin Road, Lebanon, reflects her love for plants. In addition to the growing vegetation, there are



Helen Miller has been a winner at the Lebanon Flower Show for 22 years. Above, she shows this year's best of show winner, a "fancy leaf" begonia with leaves that measure a foot in length.



A bench in Helen's yard offers a cool place to stop and rest for a minute, while admiring Helen's well-tended lawn and flowers.

pictures and plaques of flowers hanging on the wall of her living and dining rooms. And stepping out of Helen's back door is like entering another world.

Flowers of all sizes and colors form a border for her property. The green of the perfectly tended lawn, combined with the flowers and trees, make even a scorching day seem a bit cooler. A plaque, nestled among some flowers in her yard, seems to sum up her love for gardening. It reads, "The kiss of the sun for pardon, the song of the birds for mirth, one is nearer God's heart in a garden than anywhere else on earth."

"It's a lot of work," Helen said. "You have to water and keep the weeds down."

"Just wait until we get our water bill," Helen laughed.

Water is not the only problem. People are not the only ones who enjoy Helen's flowers. Rabbits, squirrels and chipmunks love them too, so much so that Helen and her husband, Richard, must catch the little animals in a cage and take them to a nearby park. If they left them in the yard, Helen's flowers would be food, not decoration.

In addition to her yard, Helen must also tend to the plants she has under a special plant light in her kitchen. These plants also have water under them to increase humidity. Since Helen grows many of her flowers and plants from seed, this is an ideal arrangement.

Helen also keeps some begonias in this special growing place, since, according to her, they are a difficult plant to grow.

"They (begonias) are the hardest thing to grow," Helen said.

Also making the list for difficult plants is the gardenia, according to Helen, although she has a huge one budding on her front porch.

Plants that are easy to grow and would be good for beginners are cacti, geraniums and coleus.

Helen is accustomed to giving advice on flowers and plants.

"People that I don't even know call me," she laughed, adding that people even call her for tips on lawn care.

As long as she continues to walk off with most of the Lebanon Flower Show awards, people will probably continue to come to her



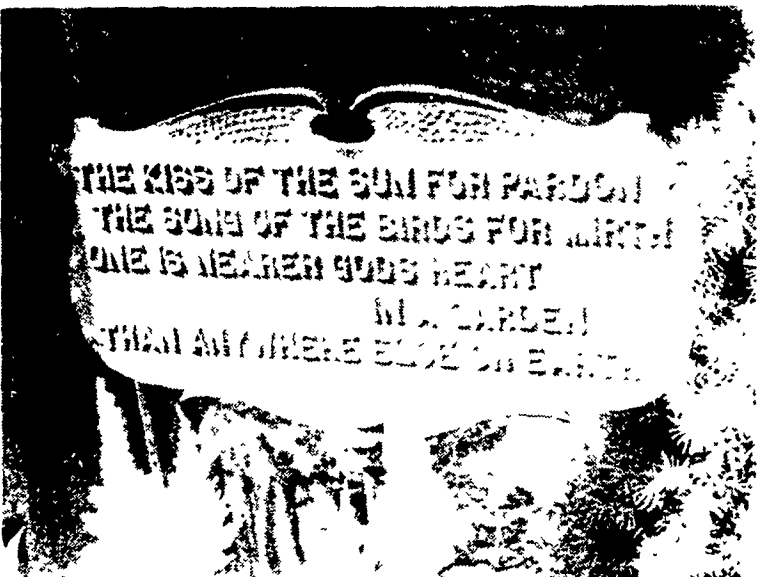
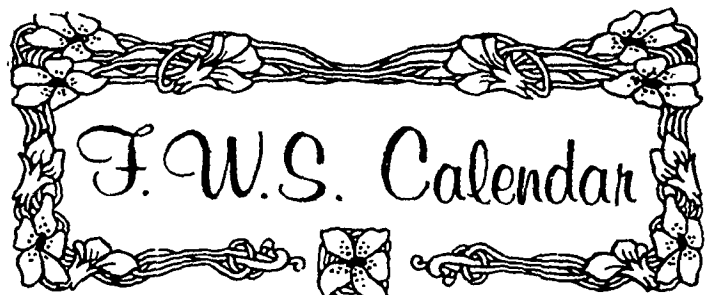
This "fancy leaf" begonia sits on Helen's back porch. She can't quite remember, but she thinks this plant won a blue ribbon several years ago.

for advice, and she has no plans to quit.

"Sometimes I think I should quit and give somebody else a chance," Helen laughed, "But then when the time comes I always enter, and I

always think somebody's going to beat me."

Anyone willing to compete for Helen's honors next year will have to move fast, as Helen is already brainstorming some ideas for the 1984 show.



This saying, which is nestled among some flowers in her garden, sums up Helen's love for gardening.

Saturday, Sept. 10
Lancaster Society 25 meets at Meadow Hills for a program by Gladys Mumma.

Lancaster Society 2 meets with Ruth Waltz on crafts.

Lancaster Society 19 meets for dried flower arranging.

Lancaster Society 16 meets at Kinzers Firehall.

Lancaster Society 7 meets at the home of Arlene Ebersole.

Monday, Sept. 12
Lancaster Society 32 meets to make grapevine wreaths with Sandy Martin.

Tuesday, Sept. 13
Lancaster Society 28 meets for a

charity work night.
Lancaster Society 22 meets to hear speaker Kathy Armstrong.

Wednesday, Sept. 14
Lancaster Society 14 meets for a bus trip to Philadelphia.

Saturday, Sept. 17
Lancaster Society 3 meets to prepare for the Ephrata Fair.

Lancaster Society 8 meets for a speaker from LARC.

Lancaster Society 5 will entertain Society 12 at the Lions Community Building.

Lancaster Society 18 meets for a program with the Mueller sisters.