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Susann deVries

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**Western Kentucky University**

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**From the Selected Works of Susann deVries**

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2011

# Spousal Acceptance Factor: Living with a Lily Enthusiast

Susann deVries, *Western Kentucky University*



## Spousal acceptance factor: living with a lily enthusiast

*Wry bemusement might describe the tone used by **Susann de Vries** in this transatlantic article about her spouse's gardening obsessions.*

'Eros'

Our modest urban lot is literally chuck-full of plants. What little sod we have in the back yard is a result of pleas on behalf of our two canine family members. I enjoy all of the vegetation, but I am not willing to *work* for all of it—at least not to the extent my husband does. I do have an interest in gardening, but more along the undemanding lines of herbs, beans and a few pretty flowers. My interest and support is merely peripheral. Gardening is “his thing”.

As the spouse of a gardening devotee, what surprises me the most is that when people walk by and comment on the plants in our yard, they often assume that as a woman, I am the caretaker. They think that the herbaceous and woody plants are beautiful and will mention how much they enjoy walking past our property. If I am feeling devilish, I will smile sweetly and say “thank you!” (and take all of the credit). On the days I judge myself as being more pious, I will mention in passing that my husband is the gardener and his fervent devotion provides the four-season interest they enjoy.

Supporting your other half with his/her botanical ventures can be physically and mentally challenging. The physical challenges are obvious. Surprisingly, it is the mental encouragement that can be more demanding. Fortunately there are plant societies and list serves\*.

### List serves and Phases...

A spouse is okay to talk with about plants and new varieties, but we only half-listen with an occasional “oh yeah?” From time-to-time we sporadically circle pictures in plant catalogs so our spouse feels like we have made some sort of contribution in planning the garden. List serves are a blessing to a spouse and take off some of the pressure for mental support. They connect aficionados and feed (not referring to NPK!) spouses through their various plant phases.

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\* List serves: A set of email addresses for a group in which the sender can send one email and it will reach a variety of people.

First there was the *Rose Phase*. I diligently helped water the roses (only at the bottom!), sprayed bug stuff, deadheaded spent flowers and gathered leaves to prepare the tender shoots for the winter deepfreeze. After all, we were in a borderline area where our particular zone for the rose type was a little iffy. But who could resist trying? Dieback and the onslaught of Japanese beetles ushered in the...

*Prairie Phase*. Native plants could survive the winters and were easy to separate and divide. Piet Oudolf influenced my spouse during this phase with the publication of his books and I think the cute, friendly nursery person who sold plants at the local farmers market had some persuasion as well. While we had good intentions of keeping plants from spreading (and thankfully a small yard), that led us to the...

*Bulb Phase*. With the combination of historical interest in broken tulips and the burning hunger for spring color after a long winter, who could resist bulbs? Of course you have to keep color in the garden all summer long...

### **Enter: Lilies**

I thought digging up tulip bulbs during the summer (to keep rot out) and replanting them in the fall was insane, but with lilies my spouse has taken plants to a whole new level. Now I have to contend with packages of plant “stuff” in my refrigerator and the basement looks as if a mad scientist has taken residence. With grow lights, test tubes and plant trays all over, I seriously wonder if our neighbors think we are growing something illegal down there. Did I mention the *groans* you hear when a furry little creature has sampled the most rare and treasured cultivar in the garden?

What is particularly significant of the bulb phase is that it has brought us into the world of plant societies. These groups are comprised of wonderful people with a passion and excitement for their particular plants of interest. They are an invaluable source for camaraderie and knowledge. WARNING: as a partner of a lily enthusiast, it is *really* difficult to retain a state of nonchalance in the plant world when you hit this level of involvement. Now there are meetings and conferences that help plan your calendar and summer vacations. That being said...

The plant world has been a wonderful ride. My spouse’s interest has connected me with remarkable people from around the world. My life has been enhanced and I am always surprised to learn how much information I have picked up through osmosis. Of course he is always dabbling with different plants and is starting to introduce alpine plants into the garden. His vision is to hire Fred Flintstone as a consultant to create some sort of escarpment on our flat, city lot in order to grow daphnes and dwarf conifers. I truly wonder how we are going to get rid of all of those rocks if we ever move and have to sell the house. For now, I am going to stick to my favorite line when people walk past our house and inquire about the garden, “You are going to have to ask my spouse; I only bring out the lemonade.”