

Michael A. Dirr

Michael A. Dirr's lifelong passion for horticulture has positively influenced a generation of students, gardeners, nursery professionals, and plantspeople. His teaching, research, and writing endeavors have advanced the art and science of horticulture and gardening.

Dirr's love of gardening was inherited from his father. In the summer months Mike and his sisters operated a roadside fruit and vegetable stand. Early hunting expeditions evolved into plant identification classes.

After graduation in 1962 from St. Xavier High School, Cincinnati, Ohio, with ample grounding in the classics, Dirr matriculated at The Ohio State University. Dirr received B.S. and M.S. degrees in horticulture from Ohio State and a Ph.D. in Plant Physiology from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in 1972.

Throughout his high school and undergraduate education, Dirr worked in nurseries and garden centers. During the Ph.D. program, he and his wife Bonnie purchased a small home with an acre of land and established their first garden. This gardening passion continues to the present with the evolution of their Georgia garden which Mike defines as sanctuary for eclectic, eccentric, and exciting plants. The garden is open to students, master gardeners, tour groups, and like-minded individuals. During spring semester, 2000, Bonnie and Mike hosted a barbecue for students, staff, and faculty with over 100 in attendance

In 1972, after graduation from the University of Massachusetts, Dirr became Assistant Professor of Ornamental Horticulture at the University of Illinois, Urbana, and in 1977, was promoted to Associate Professor. From July, 1978, to June, 1979, he was a Mercer Fellow at the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University.

In 1979, he became Director of the University of Georgia Botanical Garden. During this time he was instrumental in raising three million dollars for the new Visitor's Center/Conservatory Complex and also charted a course for plant collections development. He returned to teaching and research at the University of Georgia in 1981, and was promoted to Professor in 1984.

In 1991, he spent a six month sabbatical as a Putnam Fellow at the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University. In 1999, a six month sabbatical was spent at the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens and Arboretum, England. While at Hillier he developed a student exchange with Sara Siewicke interning from May to August of 2000. During this study leave he visited 112 gardens and nurseries, took over 5,000 photographs, 400 pages of field notes, penned eight major articles, and imported 200 plants for his breeding and plant introduction program. A spin-off from the sabbatical is the planned student study tour of English gardens for June 14-28, 2001. Thirty students are engaged and have paid deposits.

Dirr and his graduate students have maintained research programs that encompass plant nutrition, metabolism, cold hardiness, propagation, breeding, evaluation, and introduction. Dirr has served as major advisor to 23 M.S. and Ph.D. students as well as acting as a committee member to countless other graduate students.

Dirr has published over 300 scientific and popular publications and has authored or coauthored seven books. His *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants; Their Identification*,

Ornamental Characteristics, Culture, Propagation and Uses, Fifth Edition, 1998, Stipes Publishing, is the most widely adopted teaching and reference text in the country and has sold over 300,000 copies. With Dr. Charles Heuser, he produced *The Reference Manual of Woody Plant Propagation*, which has become the standard reference for plant propagators and the standard text in many propagation courses. Dirr's *Hardy Trees and Shrubs* with 500 species and 700 cultivar descriptions accompanied by over 1,600 color photographs was published by Timber Press in 1997. Two CD-ROMs, *The Photo-Library of Woody Landscape Plants*, with 7,600 photographs encompassing 3,600 plant types, was released by PlantAmerica in 1997 and *The Interactive Manual of Woody Landscape Plants* was released by PlantAmerica in 2001.

Dirr has received numerous awards and honors during his career including the Silver Medal for Excellence in Horticultural Writing and the Jackson Dawson Medal for Outstanding Contributions to Plant Propagation from the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. He has received the Silver Seal from the National Federation of State Garden Clubs, in 1993 the Medal of Honor from the Garden Clubs of America, the Scott Medal from Swarthmore College, the Educator of the Year Award (1998) from the Georgia Green Industry Association, and the Linnean Award from Chicago Botanic Garden (1998) for outstanding contributions to horticultural taxonomy. Teaching awards include the L.C. Chadwick Outstanding Educator from the American Nursery and Landscape Association; Outstanding Teacher from the American Horticultural Society (2000); Outstanding Teacher from the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) (1998); and the Brooks Award for Outstanding Teaching from the CAES (2000). Outstanding Teacher Award from the undergraduate Horticulture Club on several occasions.

In addition, his books have received the Choice Library Awards, Award for Photographic Excellence from the Garden Writers of America and the American Horticultural Society Award as one of the 75 great garden books of all time. In 1998, Dirr received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Massachusetts.

His teaching approaches are innovative and inspiring with real-world emphasis on application of information. *The Manual of Woody Landscape Plants*, Fifth Edition, 1998, is the backbone of the courses, now accompanied by the 7,600 image *Photo-Library of Woody Landscape Plants*. With the academic gun loaded for overkill, in 1999 Dirr developed (out of pocket) a web-based distillation with text and photos for every plant taught in the Horticulture 3700 and 3710 courses. Students create individual reference books by printing the information. Student feedback has been exceptional and the Department of Horticulture has saved secretarial time and paper resources. Visit the course at www.nobleplants.com.

Student evaluations are the highest in the Department and have been so for Dirr's career.

Dirr has positively improved the horticulture profession particularly at the undergraduate and graduate levels. His students permeate academia and industry. His lectures and writings have fostered an appreciation for new plants. His Georgia Plant Introduction Program has introduced over 64 new cultivars into the nursery trades. He has been generous with his time, sharing a love of plants with students, professional horticulturists, and amateur gardeners.