



2020 Rural Beautification Award

Shirley Rydberg has been awarded the 2020 Rural Beautification Award. She was nominated for this honor by the Kittson SWCD Board due to her beautiful plantings, love of gardening, and dedication to the gardening community.

Her love of gardening was inspired by her family, when she was growing up on a farm near Grand Forks, ND. As a child, her favorite chores were picking ripe vegetables and weeding the garden. She was eager to help her mother whenever she needed assistance in the garden. On the farm they would eat fresh fruits and vegetables all summer and canned the rest to enjoy throughout the winter. The joy she established while gardening at this young age shines through as she discusses her current gardens.

Shirley's home is located on Elm street in Hallock right across from the Southside of the courthouse. In October of 2014, Shirley moved into her newly built gray Ranch Style house. A red brick path leads you up to Shirley's front porch, which is bordered with lush flowers and a white railing. Shirley enjoys sharing her time and excellent coffee with guests on the front porch.

Since moving in, Shirley has been improving the yard and adding flowers, shrubs, trees, and accent pieces. She has an intimate knowledge of her plants. As she shows Heather Donoho, the

representative from the Kittson SWCD, her plantings, she describes the common name for each plant and the best way to care them.

She obviously loves all her plants, but her favorites are the lilies and the Autumn Joy Sedums. Autumn Joy Sedums are a perennial that prefer warm dry conditions. She originally planted them on the north side of the house but found that the south side provided more drainage and sun exposure. They have been extremely successful on the south side. They bloom pink in August and transition to a deep burgundy through the fall. Dried blooms will remain over the winter to add a pop of color all year. Sometimes, Shirley creates indoor flower arrangements using the dried blooms. Lilies are another favorite flower growing in her bed. She has Loly Pop, Calla, and Day Lilies. Her neighbor and friend, Jan Klein, welcomed Shirley to her new house with lilies. The lilies have thrived in her flower beds. Shirley explained that lilies will pop up in new locations due to the runners they put out. She digs up these volunteers and uses them to fill in her garden, create potted arrangements, and share with others. Shirley says, "It's fun to share". Her Calla Lilies are not adapted to Minnesota winters, so she digs up the bulbs in the fall to save them for spring. She likes to wait until the lilies are done blooming to dig up the bulbs for the winter or give them away.

In addition to her favorites, Shirley has also planted Dahlias, Sedums, Petunias, Zinnias, Dianthus, Clematis, Cannas, Lantana, Daisey's, Marigolds, Lamium, Johnny Jump Ups, Black Eyed Susans, Yarrow, Flax, Moss Roses, Cosmos, and Hostas. Shirley has an interesting fact or tip about each plant and is happy to share her knowledge. The most surprising plant in the collection is the Prickly Pear Cactus just visible from the corner of the porch. A friend from Arizona shared this plant with her. He had transplanted them in Minnesota, after coming home from Arizona. Shirley says that they can be propagated by placing a leaf or lobe, in soil and watering occasionally. The pins are sharp enough to go through gloves and feel like splinters. Shirley is careful when pruning them not to touch the pins. It's worth the trouble, when the delicate yellow flowers bloom.

Shirley has included several native plants in her flower beds. Black Eyed Susan's, Yarrow, and Flax are all native plant species. They make lovely additions to her landscaping and add habitat for local birds and pollinators. She said that the bees and other pollinators were busy in her gardens this year. She added that, "I have never been stung by a bee."

Keeping her garden neat and orderly is important to Shirley. She says that if you are consistent it's easy to keep up with chores like weeding and deadheading. When heading out in the morning she takes a pale and a pair of "nippers", or pruning shears, with her. She does a little bit every day and that's what she says keeps her yard looking neat. Each flower needs special care. Shasta Daisy's need to be trimmed back to the first leaf, because that is where the next bloom will grow. When dead heading petunias, she says it's important to remove the flower just above the bud, so it will produce another bloom. She prefers to buy the bubble gum petunias, because she has found that they tend to be the easiest to care for. As she plucks the dead blooms, she puts them in her bucket. That way they don't drop seeds and flowers won't pop up where she doesn't want them. She carries all the waste to her compost pile to nourish her growing plants.

Shirley loves to work outside. Even as a little girl her favorite chores were outdoors. The heat doesn't bother her. She can work outside all day. Her favorite time to work outside is in the

morning. She says, "It's a beautiful time of day and it's when I have the most energy." She also said, It's the best time of day to apply fertilizer or water the plants. The early morning sun isn't hot enough yet to burn the leaves where the water droplets cling. Two of her favorite chores are mowing the yard and weeding the garden. Shirley proudly says she can "Weed anytime".

Shirley's favorite thing about gardening is all the fresh fruits and vegetables she collects from her vibrant vegetable garden. Her vegetable garden is in the south western corner of her property. It is surrounded by a fence and bursting with life! "The Jolly Green Giant visited over this last week", Shirley says as she shows me around, "Everything is bigger, fuller, and more advanced this year than usual." Growing in the garden are potatoes, carrots, onions, spring onions, dill, cucumber, corn, tomatoes, romaine lettuce, iceberg lettuce, spinach, raspberries, peas, and asparagus. Inside the garden the sweet smell of dill and the sharp sent of tomatoes fills the air.

Fresh tomatoes are her favorite products of the garden. She puts extra effort into ensuring her tomato plants produce an abundance of fresh juicy tomatoes. When planting her tomatoes, she puts eggshells into the hole and sometimes coffee grounds too. This adds nutrients and promotes a healthy soil texture. "The plants need to be properly spaced out to prevent blossom end rot from ruining the fruit.", Shirley says. Another way to prevent rot on the tomatoes, according to Shirley, is to add mulch around the base of the plant. Mulch reduces the chance of water splashing onto the fruit and leaves. Excess moisture creates conditions for undesirable bacteria or molds to grow.

Strawberries have done extremely well in Shirley's garden, too. She started out with only 6 plants. They have since been divided. To make room for other veggies, half the plants were replanted elsewhere, and half the plants went to friends. All her strawberries are covered with a netting that keeps the birds from stealing the fruits of her labor. Shirley says, Strawberries are best when there is no white left on the fruit. They are juicier and sweeter when the whole fruit is red. She says, "It's amazing how much of a difference one day makes." The berries start to get smaller as they get nearer to the end of their season.

Shirley has encouraged her friends and neighbors to create and maintain beautiful lawns and gardens through projects like Minnesota Star City, Minnesota Beautiful, and activities in her classroom.

Shirley started the Minnesota Star City project in Hallock. Hallock was the only city to achieve the Star City designation with only volunteers. This program was organized by the Minnesota Trade and Economic Development Department and helped small towns in Minnesota develop necessary organizational, marketing, and problem-solving abilities.

She helped organize the Minnesota Beautiful Yard Tours as a part of the Star City project to encouraged civic pride and beautification. They toured two yards once a week and choose one winner each week. The winner would receive a yard sign and the paper would write an article about their yard. Shirley enjoyed the opportunity to socialize and share gardening knowledge with her friends and neighbors. She said the program was "good motivation for everyone to maintain high standards in landscaping and gardening"

Shirley carried her love of plants and learning to her classroom. She incorporated classroom activities that encouraged her students to take an interest in plants and furthered their understanding of how they grow. Shirley moved to Hallock in 1958 to teach 4th grade. She taught in the same building for 36 years. She taught first grade for 30 of those years and found that, if she transferred her Geraniums just as the weather began to turn, she could keep them inside her classroom all winter. She had some Geraniums that lived for several years this way. They provided a living example of plant life for her students to observe. Additionally, the kids were involved in projects like the Hairy Harry art project, green house visits, starting plants from seeds, and growing a carrot from a cutting. Through these projects she shared her knowledge and love of growing things with future generations of gardeners.

Shirley is passionate about rural beauty. She loves growing plants and takes every possible opportunity to learn more about growing a lush healthy garden. She shares her knowledge freely and works to create opportunities for everyone to learn more about gardening. Her passion is illustrated by the lovingly maintained gardens that earned her the 2020 Rural Beautification Award.

To watch a video of this interview with Shirley Rydberg go to:

<https://www.facebook.com/KittsonSWCD/videos>

