



FROM KANSAS TO OREGON: ESTABLISHING THE ROGERSON CLEMATIS COLLECTION

Linda Beutler

It began inauspiciously enough. In the spring of 1971, Dr. Brewster Rogerson, professor of English Literature at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas, set out to buy vines for the landscape at his newly built home. He returned with four clematis—a purple, two reds, and a white. By 1975, Rogerson was corresponding with clematis growers all over the world, describing himself as a scholar of the genus. There was a collecting gene in the man, and the lack of information available about *Clematis* had flipped his “on” switch.

In 1980 Brewster retired. He decided if clematis were to be the consuming interest of his leisure years, the Pacific Northwest’s USDA Zone 8a might present a better climate than Kansas’ USDA Zone 5b. He bought an Econoline van and drove west. Finding “no room at the inn,” as he put it, in his first destination, Seattle, he headed south to Eugene, Oregon.

Five years later—with most of the collection still in containers of varying sizes—Rogerson made an important friendship with nurseryman Bob Gutmann. In exchange for housing his clematis at Gutmann’s nursery in Mountindale, Oregon, Rogerson wrote the Gutmann Nursery catalog. If ever a match was made in heaven, Rogerson and Gutmann were it.

Clematis disciples gathered over the next fifteen years, as Rogerson wrote articles worldwide, helped found the International Clematis Society, and served on the board of the Hardy Plant Society of Oregon (HPSO). It was through the HPSO in 1992 that I first met Rogerson. Then an enthusiastic if nascent clematis collector, I later became the collection’s curator.

When Rogerson was diagnosed with macular degeneration in 2002, I and several others began volunteering for him at Gutmann’s. Soon prominent local horticulturists, garden designers, and specialty nurserymen began to search for a proper home for the clematis, *in a garden*. In 2004, the first comprehensive inventory was completed, with each of the 900 clematis (representing 450 species and cultivars) assigned an accession number.

Concurrent to the work of the ad hoc committee, the non-profit Friends of the Rogerson Clematis Collection (FRCC) was formed, with many of the original volunteers serving on its board of directors. As a small garden built upon one man’s contagious and beautiful obsession, FRCC had to be both fearless and patient. Their mission has not changed since its inception:

THE MISSION OF THE FRIENDS OF THE ROGERSON CLEMATIS COLLECTION (FRCC) IS TO PRESERVE AND FOSTER THE ROGERSON CLEMATIS COLLECTION (RCC) IN A PERMANENT FACILITY, OBSERVING ITS LONGTIME OBJECTIVES OF ASSEMBLING AND MAINTAINING AS COMPREHENSIVE A COLLECTION OF THE GENUS CLEMATIS AS POSSIBLE, FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF BOTANICAL AND HORTICULTURAL RESEARCH, AND THE EDUCATION OF ALL WHO VISIT IT.

Most plant collections do not have as many cultivars as the Rogerson Clematis Collection, because ▶
Rogerson began collecting in the 1970s, we have a living museum of clematis that subsequently dropped from the trade, like the heirloom ‘Colette Deville’ from 1885.





◀ Collection founder Brewster Rogerson's final directions for collection expansion included a gentle admonition to add more species. *C. morefieldii* from the SE USA is one of a growing number of North American species found throughout the Rogerson Clematis Garden.

Representatives of the ad hoc committee searched the greater Portland area to identify possible locations for the collection, and met with staff of the City of Lake Oswego Parks and Recreation Department to toss around ideas. Two months after that first meeting, the Lake Oswego City Council voted unanimously to enter into negotiations with FRCC to establish a clematis garden at their Luscher Farm facility. The City wanted three things of FRCC: to establish an heirloom rose garden around the farmhouse, to enhance the bird habitat area under the historic copper beech tree, and to restore the antique apple orchard that was suffering from years of neglect.

The 43-acre retired dairy farm with its iconic farmhouse and barn was the perfect setting.

In short order, a greenhouse was constructed, the clematis deeded to FRCC, and on December 3, 2005, a caravan of nursery trucks and private pickups hauled all 900 plants from Mountindale to Luscher Farm. The planting of the gardens began in autumn 2006, thanks to the volunteer efforts of landscape architect Nancy Gronowski and garden designer Lucy Hardiman.

Enter the American Public Garden Association! In autumn of 2007, after just four months officially on the job as curator, I attended the Association's collections management symposium on developing collection polices. By March of 2008, the FRCC board adopted its first Clematis Collection Policy and Plan, which has been updated every two years since. In 2009 FRCC made its first application to join what was then the North American Plant Collections Consortium, and was granted a provisional membership.

In January 2018, with all 900 of the original clematis (plus 900 more!) ensconced in an astonishing series of themed gardens, the Rogerson Clematis Collection, in the Rogerson Clematis Garden, was awarded full Plant Collections Network accreditation.

Our involvement with the Association and the Plant Collections Network has honed our marketing skills and provided a community of like-minded professionals, as well as a welcoming sense of solidarity with much larger institutions. Although Rogerson passed away in May 2015 at the age of 94, his legacy of keen scholarship and passionate advocacy for this global genus will continue to thrive.

As we like to say, "Support your local nationally accredited clematis garden!" 🌸



Top: Brewster with his clematis at Gutmann Nursery, 2001. Photo by Ken Wooldenden, from the Rogerson Archives

Middle: The Rogerson Clematis Garden has built troughs during the always-popular hyper-tufa classes to accommodate clematis requiring specific soil profiles. Here *C. occidentalis* var. *grosseserrata*, wild-collected in eastern Washington by one of our members, thrives with colorful companions.

Bottom: We like to set as many good examples as possible of how clematis can be used in home gardens. Here 'Freda', from the montana group, enlivens a utilitarian chain-link fence and gate.



All photos: Rogerson Clematis Garden Photo Archive

Linda Beutler is the curator of the Rogerson Clematis Garden.