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## Flowers without End

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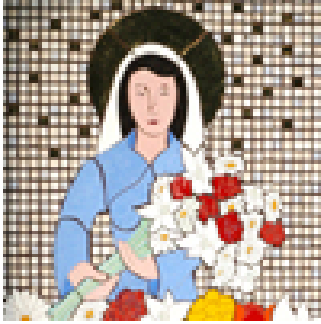
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# University of Dayton, Ohio (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/index.php>)



## Flowers without End

**04.15.2014 | Campus and Community, Energy and Environment, Catholic** Can planting and tending a garden be an act of devotion? John Stokes thought so, and dedicated his life to learning everything he could about Mary flowers and Mary gardens, a centuries-old religious practice of naming plants and creating gardens for Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ.

According to Stokes, the month of May has been especially associated with Mary and flowers since medieval times, when May Day celebrations honored her as the mother of all growing, living things (url: <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/flowers.html>).

From 1950 until his death in 2007, Stokes gathered a massive collection of material on Mary flowers and gardens, and digitized it by creating the Mary's Gardens website (url: [http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/m\\_garden/marygardensmain.html](http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/m_garden/marygardensmain.html)). Containing almost 2,000 pages, the website is the authority on Mary flowers and gardens worldwide, with an astonishing range of material that includes prayers, poetry, songs, lists of plants, designs for gardens of all sizes and historical information. Visit Mary's Gardens at <http://udayton.co/BG2>.

He made sure his legacy of knowledge would live on by donating his papers and the Mary's Gardens website to the University of Dayton's Marian Library, the world's largest collection of materials devoted to Mary.

"This resource so generously willed to the Marian Library is invaluable," said Sister M. Jean Frisk, ISSM, assistant for art and special projects at the Marian Library. "We now have the means to promote Mary Gardens and to make the Blessed Mother's life and love real while honoring the great legacy of John Stokes."

Frisk, who once spent an afternoon with Stokes, said he was initially interested in learning about the flowers and gardens as a business opportunity. He started marketing "Mary Garden" kits, but it didn't take long for him to realize the seed business wasn't viable.

"But the more he researched, the more he came to see how people through the ages used Mary flowers and gardens to cultivate this sweet, healing and tender love for Mary as the person of the every day," she said. "The more he read, the more he awakened his own devotion."

"His work wasn't about the physical objects — the flowers and the gardens — it was about how those things led people to a deeper understanding of the gentle, nurturing Mary and how people loved her."

As his devotion grew, Stokes wanted to see Mary flowers and gardens bloom around the world to help others have the same experience of coming to Mary as he had. His passion and devotion sparked an international revival of Mary Gardens that continues today with gardens found on the grounds of grand cathedrals and in the backyards of the devoted around the world.

Stokes explored and catalogued virtually every aspect of Mary flowers and gardens:

- A list of more than 1,000 plants with corresponding religious names. The red rose, for example, is "Mary's Sorrows," and baby's breath is "Lady's Veil."
- Garden designs and layouts including indoor dish gardens, beginner gardens, niche gardens and parish gardens.
- Historical information, such as the first reference to a garden dedicated to Mary planted in 7th century France by St. Fiacre, Irish patron saint of gardening and the earliest known Mary Garden in the U.S., in Woods Hole, Mass., in 1929.
- Examples of modern Mary Gardens, such as the one dedicated in 2000 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., and in 1989 at St. Mary's Parish, Annapolis, Md.

"Mary Gardens and her flowers are a great devotional tool," said the Rev. Johann Roten, S.M., director of research and special projects at the Marian Library. "The gardens connect abstract theology to the real world and allow people to devote themselves to Mary in a down-to-earth, tangible way."

Born in 1920 in Huntingdon Valley, Pa., and raised as a Quaker, Stokes experienced what he described as a "lightning-bolt Catholic conversion." After establishing a successful career as an engineer, Stokes devoted all of his spare time and

resources to researching Mary Gardens.

Stokes' work flourished until his death in 2007, when the website was entrusted to the Marian Library's care, along with numerous statues, newsletters, journals, magazines, books, personal correspondence and additional research about Mary Gardens.

Just steps from the library on the University of Dayton campus, is a living, growing testament to Stokes' vocation: a Mary Garden tucked between the Immaculate Conception Chapel and St. Mary's Hall, featuring a mosaic Mary, surrounded by flowers.

The Mary's Garden website and archive is part of the University of Dayton's Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute. The library holds the largest collection in the world of printed materials and other artifacts devoted to Mary, the mother of Jesus and includes more than 80,000 books, nearly 3,000 Nativity scenes, artworks from around the globe and other printed materials in more than 50 languages. Visit the Marian Library at The Mary Page at <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary> (url: <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary>).

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