

## The Culpepper Legacy

The tens of thousands of daffodils growing on the Culpepper Garden grounds are the most visible legacy of Charles Washington Culpepper. Having grown up on an Alabama cotton farm, he was educated as a botanist and horticulturist at what is now Auburn University and the University of Chicago. In his professional life at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, he studied the preservation of food: peaches, pears, sweet potatoes, okra, and other fruits and vegetables.

His avocation, beginning in 1926, was growing and hybridizing flowers, especially daffodils. His early successes were the Snow Gem and the Red Sunrise; he cross-pollinated to achieve disease resistance, reasonable increase, and beauty, as well as suitability for the Washington, DC, climate. After his retirement in 1955, Culpepper was a daily sight on the five acre plot, tending to irises, day lilies, and amaryllis—and tomatoes and corn.

Culpepper's generosity was evident to the neighborhood surrounding his five-acre plot. There was an open invitation to walk by or stop in to enjoy the exuberance of his flowers. He shared his gardening expertise with anyone who asked, happily translating his scientific terminology into common language. He sold cut flowers for fifty cents and traded pollen, the currency of flower-breeders, with colleagues.

In an act of generosity with lasting impact for the Arlington community, in 1971 Culpepper sold his property to the Arlington Retirement Housing Corporation (ARHC) at half its market value. ARHC had been formed by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, of which Culpepper was an active member (he provided cut flowers for the chancel from spring through fall). The church has from its beginnings in 1945 sought to lead in social justice causes, evident in its role as catalyst for this first-in-the-nation affordable senior living community.

The final element of Culpepper's legacy may be his confidence in the long term. In his professional life, he was concerned with making foods last without losing quality before they could be used. In his garden, he was devoted to the annual cycle, waiting through the seasons to see what resulted from his cross-pollinations. He hesitated to register his hybrid flowers until he knew they were reliable growers. He spent decades, from 1924 until its sale, developing the beauty of his five acres. He counted on others to continue, saying "The old folks home has promised to save everything possible, to replant all the bulbs and trees they can."

At Culpepper Garden, we're committed to Charles Culpepper's legacy: creating and sharing beauty, expressing generosity, and belief in the future.