

UConn Names a Flower After State's First Lady

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LIKE many political spouses, Patricia Rowland, the wife of Gov. John G. Rowland, heads committees, plays host at public events and promotes her home state. Unlike most political spouses, Patricia Rowland has a flower named after her, a pink alstroemeria christened Patricia Lynn.

The new plant was introduced last month at the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's "Ag Expo 2000."

Developed by Dr. Mark Bridgen, an associate professor of floriculture and co-head of the plant biotechnology center at the University of Connecticut, Patricia Lynn has been in development for 10 years as part of a research program that is partly funded by state grants. Naming the alstroemeria after Mrs. Rowland, Dr. Bridgen said, was "a way of saying thank you" for the funding.

She does not garden as a hobby, but Mrs. Rowland "enjoys gardens and flowers," said Rhonda Olisky, her spokeswoman. Mrs. Rowland personally selected the pink alstroemeria after a visit to the university's greenhouses two summers ago. "Pink is one of her favorite colors," Ms. Olisky added.

Alstroemeria, also known as the "Inca lily," originated in Chile and Brazil, according to Dr. Bridgen. Growing from a rhizome or fleshy root, the plants can reach heights over 5 feet, but cultivars such as Patricia Lynn from the University of Connecticut's breeding program are more compact, growing 2 to 3 feet tall. Alstroemeria flowers are somewhat similar in shape and appearance to azalea blossoms, and come in colors ranging from yellow through shades of pink and lavender.

The plants thrive in sunny locations, Dr. Bridgen said, and should be fertilized regularly during the growing season. They are reliably hearty in southern Connecticut, and may even survive in protected locations in colder areas. Gardeners who want to play it safe should dig up the rhizomes after the first frost and store them in a dry, well-ventilated place. The roots can be replanted after the ground has thawed in the spring. Dr. Bridgen said that Patricia Lynn will flower all summer, and will produce blossoms until there is frost.

Now that Patricia Lynn has met the public, Dr. Bridgen is looking for a commercial propagator who can produce enough plants to make them available for retail sale. The grower should be selected soon, said Dr. Bridgen, and plants will probably be available by next spring.

Ms. Olisky noted that Patricia Lynn is the first flower named after a Connecticut first lady. When the cultivar is patented, it will be marketed alongside its alstroemeria siblings -- Freedom, Redcoat, Liberty, Patriot and Sweet Laura -- all developed by Dr. Bridgen at UConn.