

the **flower** child

who became the **FLOWER KING**

story by DAVID HOLTZMAN

photos by JOSH BALDWIN



barry glick is an ambitious fellow. Always has been. Living in Philadelphia, he developed a fascination with plants at age five, and traveled to the nearest botanical gardens as often as he could. He would hitchhike there if he had to. By the time he was old enough to drive, he had plans to create his own garden that would spread over hills and meadows and offer up a sumptuous array of colors.



Glick happened to be a young man in the early 1970s, when the back-to-the-land movement hit its peak. Like many of the urban refugees of the time, he sought a contemplative place where he could be at one with nature. But Glick is also a born entrepreneur, and he already had at least one particular dream to pursue. He needed a piece of land with enough acreage for his rapidly growing plant collection. He chose northern Greenbrier County, settling on a 60-acre mountaintop at the headwaters of Spring Creek.

To get to Sunshine Farm and Gardens, where Glick lives and grows thousands of rare plant species, requires exceptional patience and skillful driving on gravel roads and steep inclines. At the end of the last twist in the road, Glick's California style Redwood house towers in the midst of a 500-tree organic apple orchard that he planted in 1972. Off to the side of this scene are several greenhouses and attractive gardens which appear not unlike those cultivated by many people who garden for a hobby.

What sets this place apart is just beyond the house, where the hills drop off sharply. Here is what draws hundreds of visitors to Glick's mountaintop, particularly between February and May, and what accounts for the proprietor's anointing himself "King of Helleborus."

The slopes are blanketed with an intense sea of hellebore

Opposite: Glick hand-pollinates a hellebore in one of his greenhouses. Left: Glick handles *Dodecatheon meadia album*, known as "Shooting Stars," a fragrant, native perennial in the Primrose family.



plants, which typically flower in late winter and early spring. Glick grows more than 10,000 taxa, or plant varieties, but the hellebore group is most prominent. Most are native to chilly mountain regions like the Balkans and the Russian Urals, and as they thrive in shady hollows, they do quite well here in Greenbrier County. For over two decades Glick has not just grown hellebores, but he also propagates new varieties using tissue culture. He initially did this himself, but his business grew so big that he began sending the plants to other labs for further production.

"I'm breeding for future generations," he says as he wanders amid the hellebores, stepping gingerly to avoid squashing anything green or taking a tumble down to the creek. "We're creating plants in test tubes. It's a quest for the best colors, the most vigorous plants ... the ones with the best possible traits

and genetics. Handsome parents usually make handsome children."

Starting with 19 hellebore species, which he had to order through the mail because stores did not sell them, Glick has made hundreds of hybrid crosses. He specializes in creating "double" hellebores, in which the inner parts of the flowers have taken on the color of the outer layers that surround them. On his walk along the hillside, the accomplished

gardener stops every few moments to point to an especially attractive flower. The best ones have an almost perfect symmetry of dark hues or spots near the edges, fading to light closer to the flower's center.

Each year Glick sets out 5000 to 10,000 new hellebore plants on the 12 to 15 acres he cultivates. Two to three years later, when they bloom for the first time, he will select the best 100 of these plants for further breeding work. There, they may bloom for another 50 years. Many

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of the plants he is selling now are 20 years old.

There are many other plants in cultivation at Sunshine Farm and Gardens besides hellebores, including numerous Appalachian natives from "Twinleaf" and "Wild Ginger" to "Goldenseal" and "Blue Cohosh." Nearby are rare flowers that Glick has obtained on field trips to far-flung gardens in Japan, England and elsewhere. There are invasive plants,



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Above: (left and right): Two of the many unique hybrid creations from Glick's hellebore breeding program.

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as well, and not only the dandelions and Japanese honeysuckle familiar to many gardeners. The bane of Glick's existence is a type of *Corydalis*. While many flowers in this genus have valuable medicinal uses, the one in Glick's garden just tries to win territory from more useful plants.

When Glick first came to Greenbrier County from Philadelphia, he was a bit naive, like most people who have a great idea but not a clue as to how to implement it. He first had to figure out how to first survive in a rural place; he often found himself chopping firewood at midnight on frigid winter nights. Then he had to figure out what would grow on the steep slopes of his mountain. This stage of the learning process took a few years.



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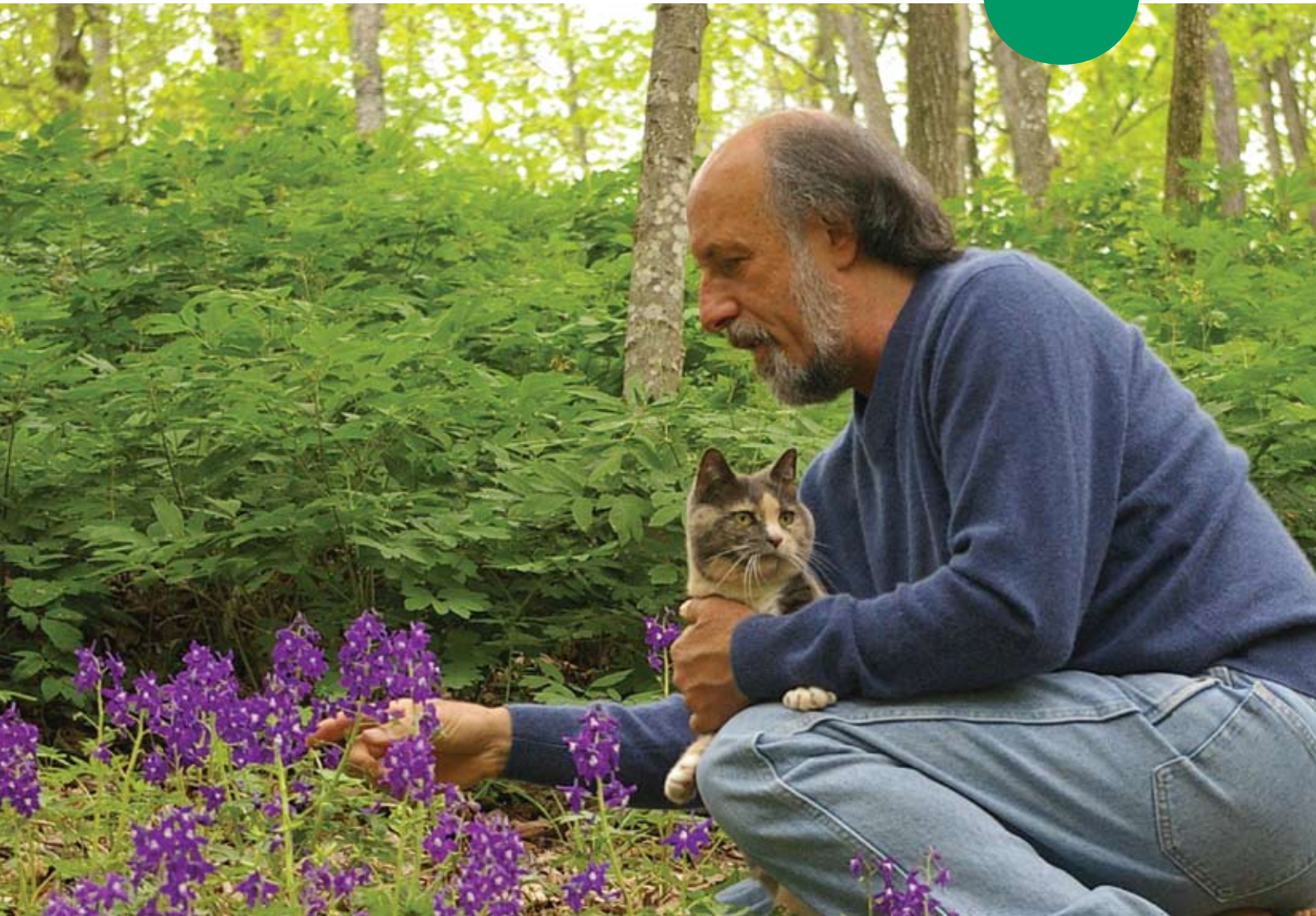
Before Glick's garden went commercial, he started a hot tub business, *Almost Heaven*, with another newcomer to the area, his friend Bob Hoffa. To make contacts and market their product, Glick and Hoffa used electronic bulletin boards, a form of communication that was unknown to most people in the 1970s. (It was in many ways a predecessor to the internet.) By the time Glick was ready to sell flowers full-time, in the mid-1980s, he had a wealth of contacts around the globe.

Sitting in his somewhat eclectic living room with a cup of steaming chai tea, while his dogs keep busy harassing your author, Glick expounds on the philosophy of life that led him down the path of a world-renowned gardener. His mind travels on two tracks, he says. One is that of the idealistic dreamer, who lets his hair grow long, lives on a remote mountaintop and maintains a strict vegetarian, environmental ethic. The other is the well-planned track, that of the businessman who travels the world to lecture on plant breeding and teach workshops in plant propagation.

Below: Glick inspects the flower of *Delphinium tricorne*, commonly known as "Dwarf Larkspur." The plant is a West Virginia native used for seedhead formation. He is accompanied by one of his upper level executive assistants.

"I guess you could say that I kind of just stumble through life," he claims. But a look around at Glick's carefully tended gardens and greenhouses reveals a much more orderly approach, however. He employs several local residents to help pollinate flowers and dig up invasive plants, giving them soft but firm directions in between conversations on his cordless phone with wholesale buyers and people who want to fly him to all parts of the globe to present lectures.

Glick may have grown his enterprise about as much as he needs to. "I have no more plant lust," he says. "It'll take me the rest of my life to learn about the things I'm already growing, to become the 'expert.' If I'm going to pass along my knowledge to future generations of gardeners and plant lovers, it has to be done right."



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