

# A tribute to Malvern's Joanna Reed, gardening treasure

Although it has never before appeared in this column, the name Joanna McQuail Reed is well known not only in the Delaware Valley, but also throughout the country, both for her gardens at 17-acre Longview Farm in Malvern and for her exquisite nature-themed crewel work.

Reed's name has not appeared here because this is a vegetable gardening column, and Reed's gardening life was devoted to flowering plants. In fact, on a Web site about Reed, under the category "Waste of Time," I read that she is quoted as saying, "I've stopped growing vegetables except for a tub of tomatoes. Vegetables are very time consuming. They're probably the most intensive gardening you'll ever do."

While I can't agree with Reed that growing vegetables is a waste of time, I can't argue that raising vegetables

isn't intensive and time consuming. It certainly occupies most of my gardening hours.

By all counts, Reed was not only a wonderful gardener, but was an energetic, generous and inspirational person as well. I only regret that I did not have an opportunity to meet her. Reed died on Monday, Oct. 21, at the age of 85.

To learn more about this woman who left an indelible impression on so many people in our community, I spoke with Caroline Amidon, a past president of the Philadelphia branch of the Herb Society of America. Reed was also a past president of the herb society and helped design and raise money for the herb garden at the National

Arboretum in Washington, D.C.

Amidon said she felt it was a privilege to call Reed a friend. "She was an inspiration to all of us who knew her," Amidon said. "Her garden just kept growing and becoming a role model. She was a role model for so many of us gardeners in the area."

Amidon remembered that Reed was "always giving, always sharing, always thinking of other people before herself. She was also the most unassuming person I've ever known. Everyone thought she was absolutely wonderful; she was always self-deprecating. And then there was her grand sense of humor."

Reed did not start out as a gardener. She and her husband,

George A. Reed, Jr., bought the 17-acre Malvern property just before they married, in the late 1940s. Her plan was that she would paint while George farmed.

But a suggestion from Dr. Albert Barnes, of the Barnes Arboretum in Merton, altered her plan. Barnes suggested to Reed that if she was planning on putting in a garden, she should attend his wife's school, a free horticultural school that had just started at the Arboretum.

Taking the courses literally changed Reed's life, and her garden became her art. "She did everything herself," said Amidon, "even the mowing. She would be out in the garden from early morning until evening. She planted every tree on the property."

Reed's artistry spilled over into

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**Pam Baxter**

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## Joanna Reed of Longview Farm-Exton

Joanna McQuail Reed, 85, of Longview Farm-Exton, died Monday, Oct. 21, 2002, at the Phoenixville Hospital.

She was the widow of George A. Reed.

Born in Hiawatha, W.Va., she was the daughter of the late James A. and Florence Hewitt McQuail.

She had resided at Longview Farm-Exton most of her life.

A graduate of Georgetown Visitation High School, she had also attended two years of college at Georgetown Visitation and had attended the School of Industrial Arts in Philadelphia.

A homemaker, she was a member of St. Philip and James Roman Catholic Church

in Exton. She was an avid gardener and an artist.

She is survived by three daughters, Franciska Huxley and Jane Lennon, both of Morgantown and Susan Novoa of Malvern; a son, James Reed of Malvern; 11 grandsons, and three great-grandsons.

In addition to her husband, she was preceded in death by a son, George Reed III. A memorial service will be held at a later date.

Interment will be private and at the convenience of the family.

Arrangements are being handled by The Campbell-Ennis-Klotzbach Funeral Home in Phoenixville.

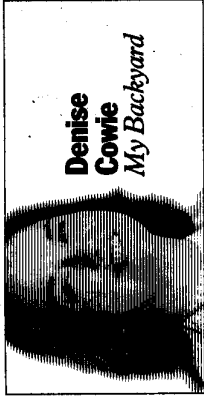
# The trowel gives way to her crewel

Famed gardener Joanna Reed uses another talent — *stitchery* — to aid a cause.

Joanna Reed has fans all over the country who admire her way with plants. But whenever health problems kept her away from her outdoor beds and borders during the last year, the celebrated Chester County gardener turned to a passion of a different kind. Gardening with wool.

"This is the way I garden now," Reed said with a smile recently as she worked, stitch by stitch, on the leaves and petals that make up an embroidered garden soon to blossom on the back of a chair in her living room at Longview Farm near Malvern.

Almost every inch of the back of the large Queen Anne wing chair will be covered with her handiwork, which depicts a riotous garden in full flower, all pricked out in English wool in dozens of different shades. And even the bulbs



**Denise Cowie**  
*My Backyard*

and roots below ground, along with some colorful toads, are magically visible along the seat cushion's edge.

It's an enormous amount of work, but Reed hopes to have it finished by Christmas because she wants to start on embroidery for a French lady's armchair.

"But you know I'm 85 — I have a great incentive," she added with her trademark good humor.

Although her extraordinary gar-

den at Longview Farm has been written about and photographed for numerous articles and books, Reed's needlework is less well known. Yet it's nothing new for the artist-turned-plantswoman, whose skill with a needle rivals her wizardry with a trowel. She has been "painting plants through embroidery," as she calls it, for more than three decades, working directly from flowers she sees in the garden.

Her crewel work is the subject of a new boxed set of 10 handcrafted cards that will help to raise funds for the institution that introduced Reed to the possibilities of horticulture — the Arboretum School of the Barnes Foundation in Merion.

Photographer Diane Mattis of Hav-  
See **BACKYARD** on E7



BOB WILLIAMS / Inquirer Suburban Staff  
**Joanna Reed's embroidery is a riot of color** inspired by the master gardener's blooms. Photographer Diane Mattis used her work to create a note-card series.

# The Gardening Report

## Stitchery abloom for a cause

**BACKYARD** from E1

ertown, an avid gardener who shoots mostly botanical images, has documented the details of Reed's needlework to produce *Gardening With Wool*, a limited edition of 250 sets of fine-art cards, each featuring an original photograph hand-mounted on a blank notecard, with color-coordinated borders.

The sets cost \$100 a box, with half the profits going to the horticulture school that Reed attended in the early 1940s, when it was founded by Laura Barnes, wife of art collector/museum founder Albert Barnes.

Reed became one of the first students to enroll at the school after a chance meeting with Albert Barnes, whose car broke down on the road outside Longview when he was on his way to Kerfeal, the Barnes' country home nearby. It had a profound impact on her life.

"What has the Barnes Foundation given me?" Reed writes in an autographed essay that is part of the card set. "A lifetime of riches beyond measure, and an interest in horticulture that is still expanding after 60 years. It has enriched my life and those of countless others. ..."

"Now in my eighties, I enjoy the mature trees and shrubs that were given to me as seedlings by Mrs. Barnes. They are a year-round treat."

Mattis got to know Reed well a few years ago when they collaborated on a similar project that helped to raise money toward a new greenhouse at Scott Arboretum of Swarthmore College, a cause dear to both women.

"Joanna said then ... if she ever did anything like that again, she would like it to benefit the Barnes school, and [for it] to be [about] her crewel work," Mattis recalled, referring to the type of embroidery that takes its name from wool yarn.

The topic came up again over the summer, when Mattis visited Longview and saw how much headway Reed had made on her needlework for the chair.

"Every time I went, she showed me something else, and I was bowled over ... her work is just mind-boggling," Mattis



DIANE MATTIS

### A closeup of crewel work by

Joanna Reed reveals the breadth of detail involved in re-creating gardens with wool.

said. She was eager to document it.

The project was launched, with the approval of the Barnes Foundation.

"Joanna has been a longtime friend of the Barnes Foundation, and very supportive of our activities in the past few years," said Robin Muse McClea, director of education for the foundation's programs, including the horticulture school.

Mattis was like a plantaholic let loose in a nursery.

"I have hundreds of pictures," she said. "It was extremely difficult to figure out what would be the final 10 in the box. The main things we are going to show are the drapery panels in the living room — they are embroidered one for each season — and then there is a magnificent wall panel that hangs over a four-poster bed upstairs. It looks like a watercolor painting. And the piece she's working on now for the Queen Anne chair ... the entire thing is going to be crewel work."

Will the chair actually be used when it's done?

"Oh, yes," said Reed's daughter Susie Novoa. That's why chairs originally were embroidered, Reed said: The thicker the fabric underneath would last.

Reed, who does Jacobean needlework designs as well as crewel embroidery, became interested when her eldest daughter, Frankie, embroidered a bellpull in the late 1960s. Reed had learned the basics as a child,

but she didn't try her hand again until she took some needlework along when she and her husband, George, went on a cruise in 1970.

On a subsequent trip, she recalled, she began picking pieces of plants during visits ashore so she could embroider their likenesses onto little squares. Soon, the ship's captain was picking plants for her, too.

In the mid-'70s, she began taking classes, "and that's how it all began" in earnest, she said.

Most of the intricately embroidered panels depicting the seasons that adorn Longview's living-room windows — the first was finished in 1978 — were done on those cruises. "They are almost like diaries of the trips," she said.

Reed still takes the designs for her crewel work from nature. As she says in her essay, "Usually I work looking directly at a specimen. To cope with the changing seasons and the fragility of flowers I make sketches, noting the color numbers of my wool for flower petals, buds, leaves, stems and fruit." One of those sketches, for a bergenia leaf and flowers, will be reproduced on the back of the essay, with handwritten notations.

Work on the note cards was in full swing last month when the Barnes Foundation made headlines with the proposal to move its world-famous art collection to a Center City site to make it accessible to more visitors. That proposal is still being debated, but if such a move should take place, it shouldn't affect the horticulture school, McClea said.

"The arboretum will remain part of the Barnes Foundation, and the school will continue to operate," she said. "We think it might even increase the visibility of the arboretum [through] the public visits to Merion." Currently, attendance at the Barnes is restricted to 1,200 people a week, and they tend to be focused on the art collection. "If that is relocated, more visits might be able to be made [by people] that are interested in the arboretum itself ... assum-

ing everything stays the same relating to [Lower Merion] Township."

I asked Reed how Albert Barnes, whom she knew for many years, might have reacted to the proposed move.

"I think he would have resisted at first, but then I think he would have risen above it" as long as the layout of the collection wasn't altered, she said. "He was a reasonable man. ... What he wanted was for everyone to look at art and enjoy it."

Laura and Albert Barnes "were like a great-aunt and great-uncle to me," she added. "They were nurturers, and they were like that to everyone who went to that school. He was so encouraging in a nice way ... [and] he did so much for people that nobody knew about, because he didn't want it known."

So Barnes' reputation for being difficult is a bad rap?

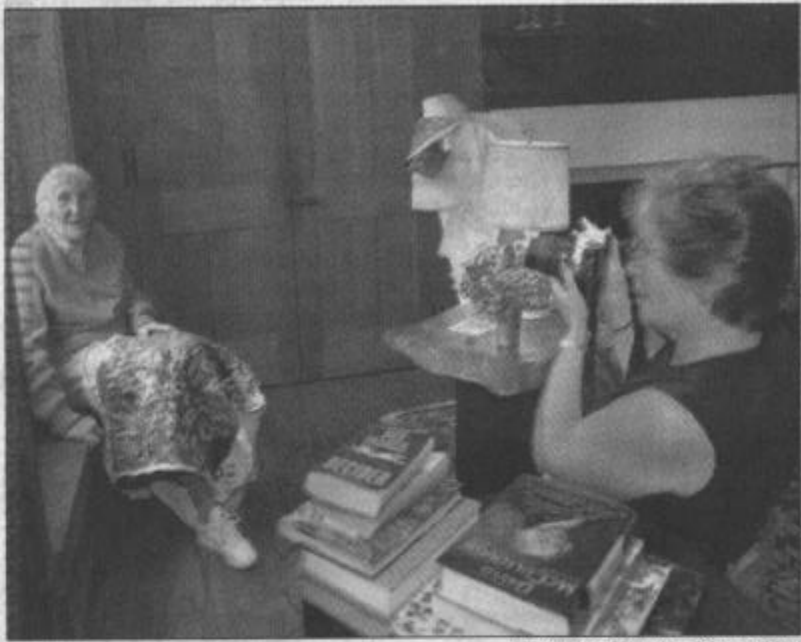
"Oh, yes," Reed said. "But he put on a facade that asked for it, and I think he enjoyed it. He liked to be a little outrageous."

"They were a big part of my life."

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### For information

"Gardening With Wool," a boxed set of 10 handcrafted cards by Diane Mattis with a brief, autographed essay by Joanna Reed, is available for \$100 (\$50 tax deductible) plus \$3.85 shipping (and 6 percent tax for Pennsylvania residents). Order deadline is Nov. 15. Call 610-449-9945 or e-mail [dmattis228@aol.com](mailto:dmattis228@aol.com). At least 50 percent of the proceeds from the sale of this limited edition of 250 boxes will benefit the Barnes School of Horticulture at the Barnes Foundation, Mattis says.



BOB WILLIAMS / Inquirer Suburban Staff

**Joanna Reed's embroidery is a riot of color** inspired by the master gardener's blooms. Photographer Diane Mattis used her work to create a note-card series.

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Caption  
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