

## Cynthia Westcott, 1898–1983

Cynthia Westcott received her Ph.D. degree in 1932 and was influenced most by H. H. Whetzel of Cornell University to go into practical plant doctoring. Westcott's famous clients included Dr. Selman Waksman, Helen Hayes, the Maxwell Andersons, and the Milton Caniffs. She conducted garden courses for Macy's department store and special clinics for Bamberger's department store and taught special courses at the New York Botanical Garden and the Brooklyn Botanical Garden. Westcott's articles appeared in numerous garden magazines. She wrote regular columns on gardening for the *New York Times* and *Home Garden* magazine and contributed to the book *Ten Thousand Garden Questions Answered*, which was published by *Home Garden*.



In 1943, Westcott was recruited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to work temporarily in Mobile, Alabama, on azalea flower spot. She cultured and identified the fungal pathogen, *Ovulinia azaleae*, and developed a successful treatment. She was among the first plant pathologists to control a disease with bisdithiocarbamates, now known as zineb and maneb.

The Plant Doctor has been featured in articles in *Mademoiselle* and *The Reader's Digest* and in *This Week* magazine, which is distributed nationwide in

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Sunday newspapers. *New Yorker* magazine honored her with one of its famous profiles in 1952. J. G. Horsfall and E. B. Cowling dedicated Volume IV of their book, *Plant Pathology, An Advanced Treatise*, “To Cynthia Westcott, the prototype practitioner of plant pathology, and all others who have made plant pathology useful.” The *Compendium of Rose Diseases*, prepared by R. K. Horst and published by APS PRESS, is also dedicated to Westcott. Westcott wrote several books: *The Plant Doctor*, *Anyone Can Grow Roses*, *Are You Your Garden’s Worst Enemy?*, *Garden Enemies*, *The Gardeners Bug Book*, *The Plant Disease Handbook*, and her autobiography, *Plant Doctoring is Fun*.

Westcott’s membership in professional societies and organizations included The American Phytopathological Society (APS), the Entomological Society of America, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Sigma Delta Epsilon, and the American Horticultural Council. The Northeast Division of APS presented its Award of Merit to her in 1969, and she was designated a Fellow of APS in 1973. She served on the board of directors of the American Horticultural Council and on the board of directors of the National Council of State Garden Clubs and was director-at-large and consulting rosarian of the American Rose Society. The Garden Club of New Jersey awarded to her its silver medal horticulture award for 1956. In 1975, the American Rose Society honored her with a presentation called “This is Your Life, Dr. Cynthia Westcott,” and the Jackson and Perkins Co. named a hybrid tea rose “Cynthia” in her honor. Cynthia Westcott’s Rose Day each year was open to the general public and allowed her to share her knowledge and hospitality. The Whetzel-Westcott Lecture Series was established in 1980 at Cornell University honoring Dr. Cynthia Westcott, the Plant Doctor, and her respected Professor Whetzel, who encouraged her to go out and doctor plants.

*Prepared by R. K. Horst*