

Peter Tigerstedt

* 8.12.1936 † 10.10.2022



An academic multitalent, Professor Emeritus Peter Tigerstedt died in Espoo on 10 October 2022. He was 85 years old, born in Helsinki on 8 December 1936.

Peter Tigerstedt graduated as Master of Science in Forestry from the University of Helsinki in 1959. He continued his studies at the same university with genetics as his major, earning his PhD in 1969. He also studied at several universities abroad. Peter Tigerstedt was Professor of Plant and Forest Tree Breeding at the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry 1970–1999 and made a significant contribution to the Viikki Campus as the founder and developer of the new discipline. Tigerstedt became a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1989.

As a university researcher and teacher, Tigerstedt focused on the population genetics of forest trees and the quantitative and ecological background of forest tree breeding. This was a particularly important area of development in Finland in the 1960s and 1970s when the large-scale establishment of seed orchards of forest trees began. Finland is now reaping the benefits of this work, as the use of selectively bred seed material is predicted to generate up to a 30 percent increase in tree

growth. Tigerstedt's list of publications is extensive. His over two hundred published works include 50 original scientific publications, in addition to which Tigerstedt edited numerous books on plant breeding. His publications continue to be frequently referenced.

Peter's grandfather Axel founded Arboretum Mustila on his home farm in 1902 and, over the years, it has developed into a unique botanical collection with entire forest stands made up of various tree species. The area is also an example of the forest garden concept where the shrubs, lianas and herbaceous plants in different forest stands also form a part of the ecologically functional and aesthetically fascinating system. One of Peter's life's missions was developing the arboretum and its management and particularly creating new rhododendron varieties by cross-breeding, using the arboretum's large selection of species in the *Rhododendron* genus. The tens of thousands of climate-hardy rhododendrons with a gorgeous bloom that have been planted in Finland and their commercial propagation beautifully illustrate the breeding efforts initiated by Peter Tigerstedt. Hardy, Finnish commercial varieties of park azalea and park rose have also been

named and been available to the public for some time now.

Tigerstedt explored the possibilities to grow corn in Finland well before it is now becoming a reality due to climate change. His department cultivated the world's northernmost breeding stock of field corn: during warm growing seasons, the corn stalks would grow to 1.5 metres in height and produce well-germinating seeds, whereas in the cold years, the height would be less than half a metre and, of the few kernels, only some would ripen.

A triticale breeding programme was launched in the late 1970s by cross-breeding many new triticale lines, and their initial success was monitored for years in bulk breeding populations and the most promising lines were selected. This also involved the development of a haploid breeding technique to speed up the breeding process.

To improve the crop security of wheat, the department also tested the mixed cropping of wheat varieties in the 1980s: would it be ecologically beneficial to grow 2–3 varieties or breeding lines with a similar growing time in the same field to efficiently maximize the growing conditions and thereby improve crop security?

Finnish varieties of sea buckthorn were crossbred with hardy Russian and Chinese ones to create varieties of the shrub that produce aromatic, vitamin-rich berries. The breeding of *Chaenomeles* as a multi-purpose garden plant was also part of the department's programme. Most of the produced cultivars bloomed in early summer as attractive, smallish shrubs and, in the autumn, would produce an abundance of magnificently coloured fruit rich in pectin, which could be used as they were or preserved with other fruit.

The colourful life's work of Peter Tigerstedt also included international scientific activities. He served as a consultant at the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research CGIAR and particularly at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), which is part of the CGIAR network and located in Hyderabad, India. He was a member of the administrative board of the institute. He also served as President of the European plant breeders' association and honorary doctor of the Estonian University of Life Sciences.

In 1969 Tigerstedt was one of the initiators of the founding of the Finnish Dendrological Society and also served as its first chair. In the same year, he proposed the founding of the Viikki Arboretum, which has taken the principle of the Mustila forest arboretum one step further: trees and other plants that grow naturally in a specific geographical area have been gathered together in separate forest compartments to form realistic ecosystems.

Peter Tigerstedt was only 15 years old when he became a radio amateur, and he eventually became the long-standing chair and honorary member of the society for radio enthusiasts.

Tigerstedt's life cannot be described without mentioning his musical hobbies, not only listening to chamber music, but also playing instruments and singing. He acted as Conferrer in the 1996 conferment ceremony of the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry, where tradition dictates that the Conferrer should leave the ball during the early hours of the morning. As it happens, Tigerstedt appeared before the conferment procession making its way through nightly Helsinki dressed as Carl Michael Bellman and proceeded to per-

form some of Bellman's songs to the celebrating crowd. He was both a curator and inspector at the student nation Östra Finlands Nation and brought life to the nation's activities as a performer of music.

Peter Tigerstedt's other hobbies were cross-country skiing and rowing on inland waterways. His spouse, two children and three grandchildren often accompanied him in these activities.

*Olavi Luukkanen, Veikko Koski,
Teemu Teeri and Terttu Parkkari*