

Varieties Unleashed

by: Robin Harris

How familiar are you with the world's first postage stamp, the Penny Black? For the specialist Penny Black collector there is not just one stamp to collect but 2,880 different states. Why? The Penny Black was printed from 11 different plates with Plate 1 having two stamps (thus, 12 identifiable plates). Each plate contained 240 subjects (20 rows of 12). Each subject had a different letter combination stamped into the lower corners of the stamp design (A to T in the left and A to L in the right) with AA being from position 1 and TL being from position 240. All 240 subjects from all 12 identifiable plates have been documented with certain characteristics such that all 2,880 stamps can be differentiated from each other.

What does the above have to do with Canadian varieties? The flower coil definitives that have been printed by Lowe-Martin since 2004 literally have *hundreds* of uniquely identifiable varieties; in most cases 300, 400 or even 500 different of the same stamp! Unlike the Penny Black where the differences are found in the stamp's design, the flower coil differences are found in the serpentine die cutting.

A fully perforated stamp has a uniform gauge across the entire row or column of stamps on the pane. Conversely, the serpentine die cutting found across the flower coils is not uniform ... it is quite random as it travels across the stamps from the left most column to the right most column of coils (which are printed 10 rolls across).

If you have purchased even a small strip from a roll of flower stamps you have likely noticed that each stamp appears different due to its die cutting arrangement.

These flower coils are printed with a "gutter" every 10 stamps along the roll. The die cutting mat that is used covers the 10 stamps along the roll by the 10 rolls across the "sheet". As we illustrate here (from 1½ rows), each stamp in this matrix of 10 x 10 (thus 100 stamps) is different. The only problem is, it takes a lot of patience to look through the entire die cutting pattern of 100 stamps to find a specific example, assuming you already have a complete "puzzle" put together! [This particular image is from the *fourth* die cut mat used on the first Permanent flower coil (Sc. 2187) which happened to also be the *first* die cut mat used on the current flower coil (Sc. 2244).]

There are two things to notice in this illustration (hopefully the detail is visible upon printing): watch how the die cutting "flows" from one stamp to the next across the rolls, and secondly, there are three or four little "nibs" of paper that join one stamp to the next in the roll. The die cut pattern and the location of the nibs are what make each stamp unique and differentiate one stamp from another.

Permanent Flower

The current Permanent flower coil (Scott 2244, issued Dec 27, 2007) has had *four* different die cutting mats used since it was first printed. Thus, this particular stamp has 4 x 100 = 400 different, uniquely identifiable stamps that can be collected! Are you crazy enough to try to collect all of these?

With that said, only three of the four different die cutting mats have appeared in rolls of stamps that have been distributed in boxes of 10 rolls per box. If you collect mint examples of every possible die cutting example, these could have been purchased at your local post office (of course, you probably would have had to purchase entire boxes of 10 rolls, at \$520 + GST per box, times the three different mats).

The fourth die cutting mat was only used to produce the singles that are completely die cut through, found only in the Canada Post Quarterly Pack 1 (Jan-Mar 2008). Since only a single example of the Permanent flower coil is found in each package, it would take you a minimum of 100 packages (at \$17.86 + GST per pack) to try to complete this group of 100 different stamps.

So, the above would likely cost you a minimum of $\$3,346 + 167.30\text{GST} = \$3,513.30$ to get a complete set of the 400 different stamps. Alternatively, if you had a good source of used material, you could eventually get the 300 different stamps that come from the full rolls (finding even one used example from a stamp purchased via the Quarterly Pack would be an extremely rare proposition). Happy hunting!

