

Alternatives



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Landscaped gardens, seminars, displays and products will greet visitors to the 32nd annual Connecticut Flower & Garden Show set to take place Thursday, Feb. 21, to Sunday, Feb. 24, at the Connecticut Convention Center in Hartford.

Connecticut Flower & Garden Show: Annual event sprouts in Hartford

By Christina Hennessy

Even as most of the state was under a thick blanket of snow, Kristie Gonsalves' attention was on a large patch of green grass — 2,600 square feet to be exact.

Since the fall, Gonsalves has been tending to the ground cover, which has been housed in a greenhouse in Suffield, in preparation for the 32nd annual Connecticut Flower & Garden Show, which she organizes as president of North East Expos.

"It's definitely a challenge," she said of the months of watering, feeding and mowing that has allowed the grass to become thick and fragrant. This week, it will be rolled up and delivered to the Connecticut Convention Center in Hartford, where it will be used by professional landscape designers and non-profit groups to create more than 20 gardens.

The work of establishing that balance of water, nutrients and temperature is rewarded the minute the

Connecticut Convention Center, 100 Columbus Blvd., Hartford. Thursday, Feb. 21, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Friday, Feb. 22, and Saturday, Feb. 23, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Sunday, Feb. 24, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. \$16, adults, \$14 seniors (Thursday and Friday); \$4 children; ages 5-12 free. Cash only. Admission includes seminars. 860-844-8461, www.ctflower-show.com

show kicks off.

"I love seeing people's expressions when we open the show that first morning," said Gonsalves of the four-day event, which starts at 10 a.m., Thursday, Feb. 21. "Every one of the senses is heightened."

Visitors to the conven-

tion center will get a taste of spring a bit earlier than most, as nearly three acres will be filled with fragrant floral and colorful scenes reflecting this year's theme of "Love in Bloom."

There will be low-maintenance and organic gardens to admire, hundreds of displays to see, gardening and outdoor supplies to purchase and a free soil testing service through the University of Connecticut Co-op. (Attendees may bring a half-cup of soil to the booth.)

The Federated Garden Clubs of Connecticut will put on a flower show and competition that will feature more than 250 judged entries.

There also will be more than 80 hours of seminars from horticultural experts

before the event concludes on Sunday, Feb. 24. Topics will vary from composting to beekeeping, landscaping to organic gardening.

Among the speakers will be Roger Swain, former host of PBS' "The Victory Garden"; Margot Shaw, editor of "Flower Magazine"; and Nick Mancini, a Westport-based master gardener and workshop leader who will be talking about how to grow organic seeds.

This is the first time Mancini will be speaking at the flower show, but he has more than 60 years gardening experience, having first started out in his native Italy. He moved to the United States in 1955.

"I've been doing this all my life," he said. "What I try to do is teach people to do it correctly."

He said it takes some vigilance to propagate organic seeds. For instance, one needs to make sure everything in the process is organic, starting with the seed, the container and the soil mixture.

"One needs to have some knowledge. But once they get the hang of it, it's quite easy," he said.

Mancini said now is the time to get those seedlings started. Learning to do it yourself, he added, is the best way to ensure the provenance of your organic plants.

For the past eight years, Mancini has offered workshops on such topics as pruning trees, grafting fruit trees, utilizing fertilizers and growing edible plants in containers. He said he has seen a surge in popularity in home and community gardens, particularly those seeking an organic yield.

"So many people are in to it," he said.

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