



Do you want to go to Chelsea?

The prestigious RHS Chelsea Flower Show opens this month and Hertfordshire exhibitors have been busy. Philippa Pearson discovers what visitors will find

The Gardens

Le Jardin de Vincent

Courtyard Garden RM15

Inspired by Vincent Van Gogh's visit to Provence, this garden is filled with soft Mediterranean planting and is designed by Patricia Thirion and Janet Honour of A Touch of France, based in Bushey, who met at Capel Manor College while studying garden design there. The drought resistant planting is supplied by Aylett Nurseries at St Albans.

The Old Gate

Courtyard Garden RM11

Adam Woolcott and Jonathan Smith from AW Gardening Services in Bishop's Stortford return to Chelsea after their Gold Medal win last year with a nostalgic garden based around a 1940s farmyard

theme. Using reclaimed materials, heritage fruit and vegetables, perennials and wild flowers, this rustic garden evokes blissful memories of days gone by. Their 2006 Sanctuary garden won them the BBC People's Award for the Best Small Garden.

A Tribute to Linnaeus MA24

Julie Toll from Stevenage is co-ordinating various elements in this contemporary garden which is designed by Ulf Nordfjell. This year marks the tercentenary of the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus and the materials and plants in this design pay tribute to him and his native landscape.

The Grand Pavilion

Harkness Roses is launching five new roses. Parky, an ivory shrub rose, named after Michael Parkinson; Belmonte Rose,

a perfumed amber floribunda; Carris, a red hybrid tea, supporting BBC Children in Need; Cherie, a scented dark red floribunda for Cherie Booth, in support of Refuge, and Henrietta Barnett, a perfumed amber floribunda, supporting Hampstead Garden Suburb's Centenary. Also introduced is The Garden Party, a new range of easy-care roses.

To celebrate the Hardy Plant Society's 50th year, the Hertfordshire group is creating A Jubilee Party featuring plants as the guests. 'The celebrities' are plants introduced by or named after HPS members during the 50 years while invited 'guests' are plants looking their best for the occasion. Society members across the county have been busy growing plants and getting things ready over the last 18 months for the display.

Floristry

Creating an exquisite floral display at the show is not for the faint-hearted as arrangers start their exhibits at 9pm the night before the show opens, finishing at 6am the next morning. Little Hallingbury Flower Club will show a sumptuous floral reflection of an opera scene in A Night at the Opera while South Stevenage Flower Club has chosen the interesting To Stir the Senses theme. It's central iron stand has been made by Mill Green Forge at Essendon.

Sundries

J's Pots and Potted Gardens from Broxbourne have a fine collection of antique, traditional and contemporary pots, statues and garden ornaments. Julia Skinner scours the country for garden features and her collection has something for every budget, as well as items that are special and different.

Alitags' aluminium, copper, teak and bamboo plant labels are popular with gardeners all over the country. The company from Much Hadham also shows a selection of bamboo cloches, garden signs and sculptures from its Bronze Collection.

Guruve from Stanstead Abbots showcase contemporary art from sub-Saharan African countries. Its speciality stone sculptures from Zimbabwe are placed with a range of paintings, metalwork and limited edition prints. There's also a Summer Exhibition after the show from June 2 at Hopley's display gardens at Much Hadham.

Two local botanical illustrators have exhibits at the show. Evelyn Binns from Clothall near Baldock has a new collection of watercolour paintings on paper and vellum and a unique range of botanical décor panels for inside and out, while Fleurs de Verre feature images of flowers and plants on clear cast acrylic. Corrine Hills from Chiswell Green, an original coloured pencil botanical illustrator, has pictures of orchids, lilies, hellebores and amaryllis plus etchings and wood engravings.

A new contemporary solar house sign will be on display at Watford-based Village Green Signs exhibit. This environmentally-friendly sign harnesses solar power technology for night time illumination. If you are looking for a lawnmower, visit Hayter's exhibit. The renowned Bishop's Stortford-based company has a fine collection of hand

and powered mowers and hover types from the Allen Hover Mower range. A timber-framed conservatory features on the Everest exhibit. Located at Cuffley, this is the company's third year at the show. Sunlander's, from Markyate will also be exhibiting a collection of its classical and contemporary cast-aluminium garden furniture.

RHS medal winner Philippa Pearson is a garden designer and professional horticulturalist ☎ 01767 651253 or get in touch with Philippa via email at gardens@hertfordshirelife.co.uk

Philippa Pearson's guide to the Chelsea Flower Show

Plan ahead

Decide in advance what areas or exhibitors you particularly want to see. Visit the RHS website for more details at www.rhs.org.uk/chelsea/2007

Tickets

You must buy tickets in advance; tickets are not available at the gate. RHS member days are May 22 and 23; public days are 24 to 26. Buy tickets online from RHS website or ☎ 0870 906 3780 (members) ☎ 0870 906 3781 (non-members) The show opens at 8am each morning and is less crowded earlier in the day

Show catalogue

Buy a catalogue in advance from the website or at the gate. You can then plan your route around the showground in advance.

Make a note

Take a notebook and pen to jot down plant names or equipment. This is also useful to get celebrity autographs. Spare change is handy for plant catalogues in The Grand Pavilion.

Refreshments

The catering stalls get very busy at peak times so take some water and snacks to keep you going. You can book a table and three-course lunch in advance at the Rock Bank Restaurant ☎ 0845 260 7000

What not to wear

Comfortable shoes and a raincoat are essential. Rucksacks and big bags are awkward, but can be checked into the cloakroom until you need them.

Buying plants

You can only order plants for collection or delivery later on. However, at 4pm on the Saturday there is a sell-off. RHS members can be re-admitted on production of their membership card, receipt or ticket stub. Don't forget, you still need to get all your plants home somehow.

Further show information

Contact the RHS Chelsea recorded information line ☎ 020 7649 1885



Top Limestone trough from J's Pots and Potted Garden

Middle South African artist Mteki

Bottom Black tulip panel from Evelyn Binns

Opposite Henrietta Barnett rose from Harkness Roses