

CHAT ROOM

MARY RODRIQUE

Stop and smell the roses at Bloomfest

Urban white – that mixture of pristine snow blended with exhaust fumes – is not a pretty sight. Yet it is one we city-dwellers are all too familiar with this time of the year. Too many days of two-inch snowfalls followed by more of the same.

It's monotonous, ugly, boring. Add gray slush and a day with no sunshine and you get seasonal affective disorder running at full peak.

A colorful break is on the horizon. April 6-9, before the flowers blossom for real outdoors, the second annual Detroit International Bloomfest will fill two Cobo Hall ballrooms with the sights and smells of a glorious spring day. Produced by the Michigan Horticultural Society and sponsored by DTE Energy, the area's biggest flower show is gearing up for a run guaranteed to perk up winter-weary spirits.

Farmington Hills art aficionado Marlowe Belanger is one of the hundreds of volunteers busy putting together what is dubbed as a show for the home gardener. Not a trade industry show – she's already contacted dozens of artists whose landscape designs will be featured among the variety of gardens displayed. There'll be a Japanese tea garden and lily pond, water gardens, and plenty of examples of what green thumbs can do at home whether you live in a condo with a cement patio or out in the country on three sprawling acres of land.

Garden variety

A third-scale reproduction of the historic Belle Isle Conservatory and an innovative children's area featuring a five senses garden and a maze are a couple of the show's highlights. A Michigan State University horticultural professor is designing three urban gardens to show how confined spaces can be transformed into things of beauty.

There will be talks given about edible plants, aromatherapy, medicinal use of herbs and wellness gardening.

Metro Detroit Landscapers Association President Larry Wright promises, "You won't find any Ginsu knives for sale here. It's based on the Philadelphia flower show, first rate all the way."

Last year, vendors in the marketplace sold all their plants and related garden items the first day of the show. This year, Wright promises they'll come better prepared.

Botanical art and sculpture, the marketplace and educational gardening programs will be offered in 200,000 square feet in two Cobo convention halls. Jeanne Vogt, president of the Michigan Horticultural Society, of the Philadelphia flower show, first rate all the way. Last year, vendors in the marketplace sold all their plants and related garden items the first day of the show. This year, Wright promises they'll come better prepared.

Big business

Gardening is big business in Michigan. The state's nursery plant production and the landscaping industry employ 347,000 folks. It adds \$3.7 billion annually to the state economy. Flowerplant growers are the second largest agricultural group in Michigan. Seems only natural then that they have an opportunity to showcase their best stuff, and that we, the consumers, get a break from the winter doldrums without heading for Florida.

Tickets for Bloomfest are available at Michigan Kroger locations. Prices are \$8 in advance; \$10 at the door; \$8 for seniors; and free for kids 12 and under. Tickets also can be purchased by mail by calling (248) 646-2990.

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Planting knowledge

BY KATHIE O'DONOHUE • SPECIAL WRITER



Tad-a-al Lorraine Karbel (top photo) shows off her finished sachet. (Top right) Marge Gordon offers assistance and encouragement to David Doeren, Lorraine Karbel and Randy Antone. (Photo above) Donna DelFavero helps as Tom O'Neill carefully glues his project.



Garden therapy helps self-confidence grow

Jeanne Gundle and Marge Gordon don't mind a little dirt under their nails.

Longtime members of the Hill and Dale Garden Club, both women have been volunteers in the group's garden therapy program in Farmington and Farmington Hills schools for many years.

Gundle explains, "It's a program whereby we go into the classroom of mentally or physically handicapped children every three weeks and do a project with them. Something with the project has to be grown."

While admitting some apprehension when she first began volunteering, Gundle says, "I'm not a teacher, but once I went, I was hooked. I get so much out of the program; the children are so sweet and open. I work with first-, second- and third-graders, and they are so appreciative as well as happy and proud of their little project when it's done."

Now Gundle says, "I would never quit it. On the days I go into the classroom, the children get so excited, saying, 'Here she comes! Here she comes!'"

The benefits of gardening as a therapeutic activity have long been documented, and Gundle believes in addition to the obvious advantages of fun and instruction, the program also serves to bolster participants' self-confidence and improve self-esteem. She has been coordinating the effort with Luille Eaton for five years.

"This is the main thrust of the garden club – to do something for the area. The volunteers love it, and classroom teachers love it."

Gundle adds that even teachers in regular classrooms are asking for the experience for their students.

In the classroom, volunteers explain where materials come from and how they help nature, and in the process present information about nature and conservation. Students enjoy plant-growing experiences, and the volunteers relate that seeing how something grows can be a healing experience.

Marge Gordon recently helped her class create a skier out of pine cones. The projects typically follow a seasonal theme, planning a Valentine's Day project next, for example. Other recent projects include a dried reed arrangement in a plastic tomato basket, a sweet gum ball spider for Halloween, and a pumpkin "vase" for live mums.

Gordon says the program is truly a special activity for the kids.

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Sharpen parenting skills with classes

BY MARY RODRIQUE

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Looking for a way to sharpen your parenting skills?

Farmington Youth Assistance will again offer a teen parenting class and a "siblings without rivalry" course at the Farmington Training Center beginning in March.

Classes are free, except for the cost of a workbook and course materials. They're open to parents in Farmington and Farmington Hills. More than 1,000 parents have graduated from these volunteer-run classes since the program began in 1977. The teen course was added in 1985.

Marilyn Suttle began taking parenting courses 10 years ago when her two sons were toddlers. She gained so much wisdom from the experience, she decided to become a facilitator.

"Everytime I teach a course, I learn something new," said Suttle, who will teach the "siblings without rivalry" class beginning Monday, March 6.

The serious meet for six consecutive Mondays from 7:30-9:30 p.m. in the Farmington Training Center, 3300

Thomas St. Materials cost is \$25 per person, or \$30 per couple.

"I love the feeling of helping people," said Suttle, mother of boys ages 10 and 13. "I'll never stop doing this."

The siblings class is for moms and dads of children of all ages. Suttle said 20 students is the ideal class size.

"The sibs class gives specific skills. Parents have a tendency to compare one child to another and that stirs up trouble," she said.

"The course shows what skills can be used instead. Also, acknowledging children's negative feelings helps them release those feelings, instead of discounting them. We also talk about roles – labeling one child as 'the sensitive one,' another as 'the bully.' We have a whole session on how to break those roles. We don't even get up to siblings fighting until the fourth week of class. All these other issues lead up to it."

Suttle and Janet Meloche, a 22-year volunteer with the program, stress that parents shouldn't feel intimidated by taking a parenting course.

"It doesn't mean you've done some-

thing wrong," said Meloche. "The best parents are the ones who come. Who

else would dedicate that amount of

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Facilitators: Marilyn Suttle and Janet Meloche, facilitators for Farmington Youth Assistance parenting classes.