

Show offers glimpse of spring

A garden railroad, water features and lots and lots of color are some of the highlights in the more than 1-1/2 acres of beautiful, blooming gardens at the 79th annual International Builders Home, Flower and Furniture Show at Detroit's Cobo Conference-Exhibition Center March 15-23.

"Overall, look for more color and more flowers this year," said Larry Wright, president of the Metropolitan Detroit Landscape Association.

He estimates 1,250 flowering and evergreen trees and shrubs plus thousands of flowers will brighten up the Cobo Builders Show and the faces of winter-weary Michiganders looking for a taste of spring.

"We are going to be using the most current techniques and styles in our garden landscapes," Wright said. "One trend in landscaping is hardscapes, which replicate the Old World look using new materials."

Manufacturers tumble new paving stones to give them the distressed look with worn edges. A variety of paving stones will be incorporated into the gardens including the cobblestone look that is popular today.

According to Wright, other trends

include water gardens, especially those with movement such as fountains and waterfalls. Retaining walls are popular. Custom deck building is also a hot item in landscaping.

The garden railroad, sponsored by Detroit Edison, incorporates a G-gauge miniature model train built into a landscape complete with bridges, tunnels and miniature people.

In the center of all the greenery, showgoers will find a three-quarter-sized New England cottage, sponsored by Wallside Windows, featuring a water garden, a vegetable garden, a tool shed with a composting area and some unusual, historical elements including stone and woodwork.

Visitors to the show can walk through the landscape area and learn about gardening, recycling, tree planting and the value of trees, how to build a natural habitat to attract wildlife including birds, and how to build and care for water gardens with fish and water plants.

Plants from the gardens will be sold 4 p.m. on the last day of the show, March 23.

For more information, call (810) 737-4478.

Figley

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you may not be able to find a seed packet labeled "mesclun." Look for names such as spring salad, stir-fry greens, Nicoise, piquant mix, Provencal and garnish mix.

The National Garden Bureau, who has declared 1997 the Year of the Mesclun, recommends planting piquant and milder mescluns in separate wide rows, then harvesting separately and mixing in proportions to suit the occasion, the meal and personal taste.

These greens generally grow rapidly, so plan to sow successive plantings throughout the growing season, sowing the first time around May 1. Furrows should be 1/4-inch deep, or, if you prefer to scatter the seeds, cover them with about 1/4-inch of fine soil or compost. Keep the seeded areas moist but not

soggy.

Mesclun seed mixes contain a variety of seeds, so shake the package to mix them before sowing.

Use scissors to harvest the greens when they are two inches tall and harvest them often by cutting the leaves just above the growing crowns. Don't let them get more than six inches tall. If they bolt (go to seed) remove them from the garden.

The piquant flavors of mesclun will delight the palate of the most critical diner, whether you serve it straight from the garden with a light salad dressing or wilt it in a little bacon grease, vinegar and sugar mixture - yuuuumm.

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