



A floral patio table and chairs seen at Canada Blooms



Waterfalls and rocks create a peaceful haven

Stouffville's Parklane Nurseries Medicine Wheel exhibit featured this splendidly carved eagle's head



# The Garden As Oasis; A Growing Trend

By Jill McWhinnie

The environment, the use of natural elements in landscaping, and the garden as an oasis were leading themes at this year's Canada Blooms.

Display gardens, designed to incorporate the show's theme, Elements, highlighted the use of earth, air, water and fire to create stunning and environmentally friendly landscapes.

Ecotopia, a collaboration of government agencies, non profit ecology groups and private landscape firms, expressed the theme beautifully. This inviting display garden, framed by a large "living wall" of plant material, demonstrated environmental gardening practices including energy conservation using solar collectors to power lighting and fountains, reduction of household waste by composting, water conservation through use of rain barrels, and the creation of habitat to attract wildlife.

Ecotopia included a bat house, located high on a pole in the sunniest spot of the garden. As bats like their digs warm, the house was painted black and placed in a location where it would receive about eight hours of direct sunlight daily.

Wildlife, in the form of totem animals, also highlighted the Medicine Wheel display of Parklane Nurseries. Large decorative rocks, the 12 moonstones of the Medicine Wheel, were carved to represent an eagle, beaver, otter, deer, and other totem animals of aboriginal culture. Medicinal herbs and plants associated with peace, healing, and harmony, including white sage, nettle, valerian and sweet grass, were

planted around the wheel.

The backyard as an oasis of restorative quiet and harmony was reflected in the cozy "outdoor rooms", surrounded by lush greenery, accented by white or monochromatic floral displays. Small gardens are particularly suited to these enclaves. Water figured prominently, with waterfalls, decorative fountains, naturalized streams, and fish ponds. To prevent mosquitoes from taking up residence, the need to keep movement in the water was emphasized.

The sense of enclosure was enhanced with "walls" of natural materials. The suburban monotony of board on board fencing was nowhere to be seen. The "living wall" was often used in office settings with tropical plants. The City of Toronto display contained a number of these walls, designed for outdoors, using hardier species such as miniature evergreens.

Red osier dogwood trellis and fencing was prominently featured in a number of displays, including that of the City of Brampton, where a stunning red osier arbor spanned a wooden walking bridge over a naturalized stream. Some trellises contained open spaces or "windows" on which were placed pots of spring flowering bulbs. Stained glass panels featuring songbirds and flowers as well as clear glass panels formed the walls of many outdoor rooms, revealing the garden beyond and creating picturesque and soothing views.

Garden retreats can also be the focal point of the family's summer entertainment, extending the living space of the home into the backyard. One display featured a

large, multi-tiered wooden deck, complete with barbecue, gas fireplace and mini-waterfall. Sound, whether of recorded birdsongs or the gardener's favourite music, can enhance outdoor entertainment by dampening the intrusive din of traffic and other outside noise.

Decorative garden lighting is also a major trend, with a particular emphasis on large glass and metal lanterns, hanging from posts or placed along pathways. A whimsical tribute to outdoor dining was a prize winning floral display consisting of a patio table covered with a "tablecloth" made entirely of fresh white chrysanthemums, chair pads made of yellow roses and a layer cake of pink, green and white carnations.

Other spectacular arrangements, created by international floral designers, reflected the environmental theme of the show. One such display, Global Warming, featured a black metal globe on which had been arranged the massive orange spikes of Bird of Paradise flowers, depicting the world on fire. A beautiful, yet sobering display.

Perhaps this was the ultimate message of the show; as gardeners we must recognize our connection to the elements; the rich fertile earth, the precious rains and groundwater, the warmth and energy of the sun, the swirling air currents that shape our weather. And as we extend our home's living space into outdoor rooms, we must become more aware of the fundamental value of these elements, and recognize that by working in harmony with them, our gardens can become refreshing retreats from the hectic pace of daily life.

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