



Mary Poppins flies everyday in the Magic Kingdom through the fantasy of Walt Disney topiary art. Sometimes taking years to form, topiary art is found throughout the Vacation Kingdom. This 12 ft Mary Poppins figure is located near the world famous "Cinderella's Golden Carousel" in Fantasyland. (cc Walt Disney Co./86)

DISNEYLAND HORTICULTURE

Recipe for how to garden as if money did not matter: take one Disneyland theme park, add over one million trees and shrubs, 1500 acres of grass, mix in 500 gardeners and simmer until it shines.

Because shine it does, with the expertise of design, plantsmanship and quality plants as well as the shine of pride of those involved in its creation and maintenance. The old line about "you gotta see it to believe it" holds true but if you stay with me for a few more lines I'll try to help you get ready for the sight.

For those of you who read my regular column, you'll know how much I like a good garden and how I like to be pretty short and to the point in describing how to go about getting the job of gardening done. Well, I have a problem in knowing where to begin with these gardens; can you imagine over 3500 acres of landscaped plants containing over one million trees and shrubs. In the day we spent touring Walt Disney World last October we heard more great gardening stories and saw more interesting sights than will fit into a few columns of print.

I am sure you all know that Walt Disney world in Florida is composed of two separate theme parks: the Magic Kingdom (with Mickey and the gang) and EPCOT centre (a futuristic display of community technology). These two areas are joined by a monorail system. It will also come as no surprise if I tell you that this is Florida's biggest tourist attraction.

All of the areas within the Disney World are themed, for example, Adventureland, Fantasyland. Gardens follow the theme of the area which contain them. When you visit

the hair-raising roller coaster ride disguised as an ore wagon ride in a mine (Doug recommends this one), you are in Frontierland and the gardens are cactus, sagebrush and themes representing the "wide west". The gardens of tomorrowland are sculptured pieces of hedges and beds of coloured foliage. Fantasyland contains some great examples of topiary (sculptured plants). The major point though is that all the gardens are designed to emphasize and enhance the general theme of the area. Disney World would not exist without its gardens.

One of the greatest trees in the Magic Kingdom is not even a real tree. If you remember the Swiss Family Robinson story of the island castaways, you'll remember that they built a large treehouse in a banyan tree. This came complete with running water, bedrooms and most of the conveniences of modern living. Sure enough, the tree is there and climbing through it is a great experience especially when you look down from the very top. What you do not find out until the guided tour is that the tree is concrete and reinforced steel with over 60,000 individually attached leaves. I guess you'd never have to rake the lawn.

Real trees can be very impressive in Disney World. The staff are very proud of the "Liberty Tree" which dominates Liberty Square in Frontierland. This 130 foot tall Oak was found on the Disney property and was moved into location by a crane. Sounds simple, well, you try moving a 130 foot tall tree sometime. They drilled two holes through the tree, inserted steel dowels and picked it up with a 100 ton crane. Picked it up is an easy way of saying that the crane got it off the ground but actually had a bridge collapse underneath them

while trying to move the thing into position. The tree got moved, the holes in the tree were repaired (you can see them if you know where to look) and pruned and trimmed this tree is still one of the largest trees ever successfully transplanted. You think you got it tough trying to plant a tree in the spring.

Trees aren't the only things to be successfully moved around in the gardens. The topiary also moves around regularly, a finished display is moved out of the nursery area into a display zone and several weeks later when it needs pruning and trimming, it is replaced with its identical twin. The twins alternate between the nursery and display areas so that the display is always fresh and perfectly grown. Topiary for those who haven't seen it is the use of plants to create sculpture. Disney creates all his characters in plants; my favourite was a Mary Poppins complete with umbrella and suitcase created out of 3 different plant species. Another favourite was a parade of elephants, about 5 of them in a row, each smaller than the preceding one with the trunk of one clasping the tail of the one in front. The baby elephant was about 4 feet tall and the bull at the front about 12 feet tall. The staff member who takes care of all this topiary is interesting in that he is legally blind, having only peripheral vision. To see him stuff and work one of the figures belies his handicap and his creations are truly works of art.

Disney's works of art owe a lot of their success to the neverending attention to detail. During the construction of the Japanese gardens, the Japanese gardener was building a bamboo fence; one of the vice-presidents of Disney World happened by and asked if everything was OK. Upon discovering that the rope was not quite right (it was not Japanese), he asked the gardener to stop working on that project. The "right" rope was then ordered from Japan and arrived in time for work the next day. Disney staffers do not fool around in getting the right material. It should also be pointed out that the authentic bamboo fence has lasted quite nicely without maintenance for 5 years since it was built. The unauthentic fence which had to be built to conform to Florida building codes (it was on the other side of the walk and was in front of a pool of water) has been replaced yearly because of damage caused by the people walking by. One of the other

interesting features of the Japanese gardens was the use of rocks. These rocks caused an authentic Japanese belly-laugh because they were specially imported from Japan for the garden. The gardener was meditating on their placement and working in the traditional way to achieve a specific result. Well, you can imagine his amazement at the American way of life when he discovered that the Disney "realism" crew had painted his rocks to make them more realistic.

As part of the landscape, Disney's rock work is nothing short of phenomenal. The majority of rocks in the park are artificial and enhanced by painting and moulding. Walking through the

Canadian pavilion at Epcot was an interesting experience. From the main road looking into garden pavilion, it is a view of Butchart Gardens in Victoria B.C (miniaturized) against the background of the Rocky Mountains. Walking into the garden causes the mountains to start to loom over you and finally you find yourself looking up into the start of a very realistic Rocky Mountain pass. The trees are forcing themselves up through the fissures in the rock, are stunted and are completely in character. It's not until the guides take us through a little side door in the mountain pass and we walk out into a parking lot (destroying any illusion of height and grandeur) that it is possible to see that the mountains are hollow and the trees are being grown in large tubs with artificial feeding and drainage. Growing these trees in large tubs is a masterpiece of horticultural engineering, not overfeeding or overwatering but maintaining a large tree in a relatively small space is a job that I would not want to do on such a grand scale. Even the Liberty Tree that I mentioned earlier is growing in only 6-8 feet of soil because the entire Magic Kingdom that the public sees is actually the second story of the park. The first story contains all the service areas, kitchens, dressing rooms, etc. for this theatrical theme park.

I found it quite interesting that Disney staffers do not grow all their own plant material but actually buy most of it from local growers. They keep the big stuff, the Banana trees and hanging baskets going in their own greenhouse range but the majority of plants are bought in.

The Epcot centre (Experimental Prototypical Community of Tomorrow)