

Chelsea blooms

The prestigious RHS Chelsea Flower Show opens this month and Essex exhibitors have been busy. Philippa Pearson discovers what's in store



Above A collection from Bushuken Bonsai



Above Trees from King & Co from Rayne

Right One of the unique sculptures on the Garden Totems stand



The Grand Pavilion

TO celebrate their tenth year at the show, the Grenada exhibit features tropical flora and exotic spices surrounding a fisherman's shelter, nestling in a tranquil bay. Suzanne Gaywood, originally born in Grenada and now living near Maldon, has been instrumental in designing and creating the popular Grenada exhibits over the years and her achievements won her a Woman of the Year award in 2006.

From East to West is the title of Bushukan Bonsai's exhibit. Based in Hockley, the nursery is showing bonsai in both a Japanese garden and in a typical English garden which will inspire gardeners to use bonsai in any situation. Sheila Chapman from Abridge will be showing her wonderful collection of clematis again including two new varieties: Ibi, a Japanese cultivar, which has large white flowers with a red centre, and Kaen, which has deep pink double flowers with pale green lines along the centre of the petals.

The tantalising aroma of Ken Muir's strawberry display can be smelt several metres away – not surprising really as between 3,000 to 4,000 plants are used to create the display. Based at Weeley Heath near Clacton, the company will be launching a new strawberry at the show, Sonata. This mid-season variety will withstand drought and periods of heavy rain.

Rhodes & Rockcliffe hold the National Collection of Begonias at its Nazeing nursery. Among its show exhibit of begonias in natural setting will be some new plants including an unidentified one that hasn't been seen in the UK before, collected from the University of South West Florida Botanic Garden.

Lifelong learning exhibits

Two educational exhibits created by Essex organisations are on show in The

Grand Pavilion. A section of green space from the residential Clapton Park estate in Hackney is recreated by the Grass Roof Company, from Horndon on the Hill.

The company has worked on the landscape design and maintenance of the estate for a number of years and the display shows how its techniques have reduced herbicides and increased biodiversity.

Writtle College's How Green is My Garden? shows how easy it is to incorporate environmental aspects into a garden and gives information on how to carry out a garden 'green audit'.



Above A collection from Stephen C Markham

Floristry

Creating an exquisite floral display at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show is not for the faint-hearted. Arrangers start their exhibits at 9pm the evening before the show opens, working through the night to finish at 6am the following morning.

Buckhurst Hill Horticultural Society will show a sumptuous floral reflection of *Madame Butterfly*. This will represent the chosen theme of *A Night at the Opera*.

Many aspects of the display will be sourced from members across the whole club.

Sundries

In its second year at the show, King & Co from Rayne will display a comprehensive selection of trees, shrubs and topiary. On Tuesday, May, 22 the show's opening day, Charlie Dimmock will be helping out at the stand. Tall trees with interesting bark, leaf and flowers and trees for screening are at East Horndon-based Ruskin Tree and Landscapes' stand where you are encouraged to touch the trees and crane your neck upwards to see the ten-metre high specimens.

Beautiful pieces of recovered driftwood from the world's rainforests

Surviving the 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 then.

Show catalogue

Buy a catalogue in advance from the RHS website or at the gate, 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 helpful 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. To book call ☎ 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 and delivery later on. However, at 4pm on the Saturday there is a sell-off. RHS members can be re-admitted on production of a membership card, receipt or ticket stub. Don't forget you still need to get all the plants home somehow.

Further show information

Contact the RHS Show recorded information line for more details call ☎ 020 7649 1885



Above Fantastic sculptures from Rainforest Relics are also on show



Above Balinese Parasols feature on East4West's exhibit

Below Juicy strawberries from Ken Muir



are on display at Rainforest Relics' stand. Based in Stapleford Abbots, the products are environmentally sourced from South America and Asia. More sculptures are on show at the Garden Totems stand. Colin Keay-Chaplin from Wethersfield creates contemporary wooden totem sculptures, which weather beautifully over time, made from English Larch and Douglas Fir.

Harlow-based Bulldog Tools will be exhibiting its Premier Range of gardening tools including a special shrubby spade and fork, ideal for smaller borders, and the Wizard Rake which is perfect for lawns and yet

suitable for sweeping patios and decking. Handmade Eastern ceramics and Balinese Parasols feature on East4West's exhibit. The Woodford Green company also have a wide range of Oriental ornaments for the garden.

Stunning lead garden ware, from planters and urns to larger statues and fountains, feature on Dagenham-based Stephen C Markham's exhibit, while Terrace and Garden, from Rickling Green, have a range of handcrafted glazed terracotta pots and planters, the Kew Gardens Collection, together with wirework garden furniture and decorative items.