

# HOME & GARDEN

## Shows can fertilize gardeners' imaginations

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Recorder Columnist

**G**arden shows and fairs abound at this time of the year and visiting one can give you clues on how to be a winner yourself. Every August the Berkshire Garden Center in Stockbridge holds a flower show at which specimens of various flowers are judged in addition to potted plants and arrangements created around a theme. There are even some vegetables on display.

When I visited this year's show, I was particularly struck by a basket collection that was made up entirely of miniature vegetables. Cherry tomatoes, tiny new potatoes and carrots nestled against Tom Thumb lettuce along with miniature patty pan squash and green peppers. There were even perfectly formed heads of cabbage that were no larger than a lime. In addition the vegetables were perfect and unblemished — well deserving of a prize.

### BETWEEN THE ROWS

There was a display of herbs. No little bunches of dried herbs here. Some of these displays were quite elaborate, and as much care was taken in their arranging as would be with exotic perennials. One collection of herbs that included rosemary, bay, variegated sage and thyme was planted in a rustic basket made of coiled, dried grapevines. Another entrant planted silver thyme, little leaf basil and a French berry plant bedecked with small blossom and bell-like berry in a low, terra cotta bowl. These entries broadened my view of the possibilities in herb arrangements; they needn't be limited to adding an invisible *je ne sais quoi* to the stew.

As beautiful as the vegetables, herbs and potted plants were, it was flowers that were displayed in colorful abundance. There were different classes in the show. Perennials, annuals and roses were exhibited, and the judges were to award prizes for flowers of outstanding quality, with leaves and blossoms showing no insect or disease damage, and in prime condition. One entrant was told her exhibit of fragile, translucent Shirley poppies did not win because all the

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I saw some flowers on display that I would love to grow in my garden; learning about new plants and flowers is one valuable reason for going to garden shows.

Salvia is usually seen as a flaming torch in the garden, but Wood Indigo bore deep purple, velvety spikes of flowers and Sight Delight was a rare shade of rich apricot.

Lohan Inocora was an unusual variety of Ageratum sporting flat heads of small, deep gold flowers, very different from

I have a feverfew (matricaria) in my garden, and I'm very fond of its tiny daisy-like flowers, but after seeing Golden Ball on display with its neat little brilliant heads (Golden Ball is an unusually descriptive name), I'm eager to make room for it next spring.

A friend told me I should have some cleome in my garden, and I nodded noncommittally, not knowing what I was missing until I saw Purple Queen. These tall, fast growing plants produce spectacular airy blossoms that share space at the end of the stalk with delicate seed pods.

One of the most breathtaking exhibits was a heavy spike of golden lilies called Golden Splendor; never has a flower so lived up to its name. A real knockout.

These specimen flowers were exhibited in identical plain containers, and the quality of the blossoms was paramount.

Another section of the exhibit was devoted to flower arrangements, and, while the condition of the flowers is important, vision and aesthetic appeal of the arrangement and even the container is of equal value.

There were several classes, each identified by a quotation. I confess that I did not understand the quote, "That breaks his magic chains at curfew time," or its application to the arrangements, but one of the most striking entries was a large arrangement of white baby's breath, white spider mums and large, spiky teasels.

Another class required "an arrangement to include both wild flowers and visible water to fit into a niche 32 inches by 32 inches by 18 inches." It was interesting to note that the judges took the requirements very seriously, and entries were marked down if they did not fit the niche in proportion or if the water was not visible or an integral part of the design.

My favorite arrangement only won second prize, but with its airy assemblage of blackberry lilies, giant alliums, dill, coral bells, euonymos, coreopsis and yarrow it seemed to me to embody "... a time for mirth and laughter." However, the judges felt that the arrangement was too light and lacked sufficient substance.

If you are preparing to enter flowers in a fair or show, read the requirements for exhibiting very carefully. It is heartbreaking and yet be disqualified from the judging because there are two and not three blossoms or some other requirement has not been met.

If you are not interested in exhibiting flowers yourself, attending a flower show can introduce you to new plants and give you all kinds of ideas on how you might arrange your own flowers with more effect at home. It is also a chance to surround yourself with beauty, to contemplate the complex perfection of the humble marigold and stand in awe of the productivity of the soil and the creativity of the human spirit.

### GARDEN CALENDAR

The following information is provided by the Franklin County Extension Service.

**NOW IS THE TIME TO:**

- Force your Christmas cactus into bloom by exposing the plant to short days. Keep it in total darkness for 12 to 14 hours each night until buds form. The temperature should be under 60 degrees F. during this period. At 55 degrees F. flowering occurs regardless of day length.
- Allow plants to finish the summer growth cycle in a normal manner. Never encourage growth with heavy applications of fertilizer or excessive pruning at this time.

## Farmers Market

EVERY SATURDAY 8 A.M. TO 12:30 P.M.



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