

Aurora Garden Fair will give ideas for your 'little piece of heaven'



By Brock Weir

The Aurora Garden & Horticultural Society might be known for their green thumbs, but when presented with a challenge to get creative, they wasted no time in getting their entire hands dirty to rise to the occasion.

This month, the Society, along with local garden companies and environmental groups will conspire to transform Town Park into a veritable oasis in the Aurora Garden Fair.

Slated to take place rain or shine on Sunday, May 25, the event will not only include the Society's popular annual plant sale, but demonstrations, a garden feature 'oasis', a kids potting zone, and musical entertainment.

'There is a competition from the Ontario Horticultural Association to try something creative and new that we hadn't tried before,' says Cindy Scuithes of the Aurora Horticultural Society. 'Our past president was at the convention and he took up the gauntlet. He thought it was a great idea to expand our usual plant sale and turn it into a whole fair.'

But, beyond the cuffs of their well-worn gardening gloves, organizers have something more up their sleeves.

'You have got to grab attention and what we needed to do was make a big splash,' adds Society President Debra Brownness. 'We know we have a very good town and we wanted to make it a local community-focused event. We asked ourselves who would be the type of people that would come to the event and what they would come to see. We wanted local people to come and see local vendors, local exhibitors, and learn about the local community.'

Working with the theme 'From the Ground Up', beyond the plant sale, vendors, and kids' potting zone, will also be demonstrations in landscaping, hardscaping, and other ways to spruce up your gardens and backyards, yes, from the Ground Up.

'Not everyone is going to be on their knees planting flowers,' says Judy Ryan. 'Sometimes they just want a barbeque but they want to do it in a nice yard.'

Adds Ms. Brownness. 'Experiencing the outdoor lifestyle is really something of a bigger picture. Everyone is improving their backyards and front yards. We find that doing an annual garden tour people are working very hard all over Aurora in improving their outdoors. The outdoors are such a short time frame. Everyone wants to make the most out of it and they want it to be a happy place

to be.?

The inaugural Aurora Garden Fair will include components of the Society's annual plant sale, which is a popular fundraising event held in various venues around Aurora, including the Royal Canadian Legion, selling prized flowers, plants, and other specimens grown in the very own gardens of Society members.

Also playing an integral part in showing fairgoers all their backyards and gardens can be is King's Pathways to Perennials, which will be installing a 'garden oasis' feature as a focal point at Town Park. Additional vendors include The Dirt Girls, Countryside Gazebos, and educational booths from places like the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, Master Gardiners, Windfall Ecology Centre, and Seeds for Change.

'Seeds for Change has a challenge to get more vegetable gardens in York Region by 2015,' says Ms. Scuiithes. 'When we go out with the garden tours, we are coming across all sorts of age groups. Gardening is not an old person's function or pastime anymore.

Adds Ms. Ryan: 'Young people are really embracing that and whether it be growing vegetables or growing a few flowers, or just improving their properties, people are really improving their little bits of heaven.'

Although the fair runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., the official kickoff will take place at 12 noon when the Aurora Garden Fair is formally opened by Newmarket-Aurora MP Lois Brown and Mayor Geoffrey Dawe. The Aurora Garden and Horticultural Society were recipients of funds raised from last year's Aurora Mayor's Charity Golf Tournament.

'Gardening to us is relaxation, physical exercise, a hobby, an interest and a passion,' explains Ms. Browness. 'For us, it is the passion. We want people to get that connection, find out who are the places they can go to locally to help them get connected and get into the passion and hobby of gardening.

Adds Ms. Ryan: 'If this is successful, we would like to do it again, but it is our first time and we are keeping our fingers crossed that, one, it doesn't rain and, two, that everyone who comes to the fair has a good time.'

The Aurora Garden Fair is chaired by Stephen Granger and Ray Matsalla. Interested vendors or volunteers can reach Mr. Granger at sgranger@rogers.com. For more information on the event, and other initiatives of the Aurora Garden & Horticultural Society, visit www.gardenaaurora.com.