

HAMPTON COURT SPECIAL

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PULLOUT
GUIDE TO
THE BEST OF
THE SHOW

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Inspirational beauty: Hampton Court Palace's Tudor-baroque façade provides a majestic backdrop to the show, which this year features grow-your-own vegetables and wildlife gardens as well as floral displays

A thoroughly seasonal (and relaxed) affair

On the eve of the largest and most popular of the RHS summer shows, we guide you through the 25 acres of flowers, gardens, displays, shopping and events. Here, **Matthew Wilson** reveals what makes Hampton Court a marvellous day out for the whole family



If Chelsea Flower Show represents the cool, city-chic end of the flower-show spectrum then, for me, Hampton Court Palace Flower Show (July 8-13) has always offered something very different but just as alluring; relaxed, inspirational beauty.

The setting itself is lovely enough without a flower show to embellish it. The Long Water bisects the site and provides the foreground to the palace, a wonderful collision of Tudor and baroque that creates a unique backdrop to the show. The Gala Evening on Monday sets the tone: a thoroughly summery affair with fold-up chairs and wicker hampers much in evidence as the fireworks pop and sizzle through the sky.

But this year the show is taking on an even more distinct identity, while at the same time the quality of the gardens, nurseries and displays has stepped up several notches to the point where it looks like being the most exciting for years. The excitement will start with the transformation of the Long Water from a quintessentially European landscape feature into a Thai floating market, complete with 15 boats filled with goods traditionally associated with Bangkok's famous floating market (see page 6). The Thai Tourist Board has clearly warmed to the task and the market atmosphere will be recreated right down to the façade of a traditional house, all of which add up to rather extraordinary scene.

Inside the show, the main themes are food and the environment. The Climate Change Dome will be staffed by experts

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from the Met Office and the Royal Horticultural Society, who will provide advice and information on the impact of climate change on gardens and what we can do to ensure that we are using the right plants and appropriate techniques in our own plots.

The theme of climate change extends into the show gardens, with the London Wildlife Trust showing a garden featuring animals that we can expect to see in our gardens in the future – the Camberwell Beauty butterfly and Wasp Spider, to name but two. The plants and materials used in the garden are all recycled.

Southend-on-Sea Council shows the Water Table garden, which mixes water conservation and communal dining in what looks to be a particularly strong design.

Other show gardens to look out for include The Green Room for

Holiday Inn, The Burghad Sanctuary, and the Traveller's Garden, which has been developed with the expertise of the Association of Professional Landscapers and the Society of Garden Designers. But it's the Porsche Garden that has particularly caught my eye, dealing with a problem that is becoming all too pressing in our towns and cities: the loss of front gardens to provide paving for car parking. The solution offered here is to install a hydraulically operated ramp that hides the car, leaving behind a planted garden. This may seem far beyond the ambitions of most of us, but it's from ideas such as this that debate is stimulated problems highlighted and, perhaps, solutions found.

The continuing interest in grow-your-own vegetables, and the recognition of the importance of ethically produced, seasonal produce is highlighted in the Growing Tastes Marquee, which will combine the popular RHS Summer Fruit and Vegetable Competition with displays and cookery demonstrations.

Visitors can drop in to see presentations by leading chefs and growers. The centrepiece will be the Growing Tastes Kitchen Garden, designed by Michael Balston and Marie-Louise Agius working with the team from RHS Garden Wisley, who have grown all the produce on



display. The garden is divided into an Asian zone featuring plants such as pak choi, azuki beans and Japanese turnips and planted wok containers. The

Mediterranean zone has olive trees, fennel, artichokes and romaine lettuces; and the British garden features more familiar fare, such as beetroot and potatoes alongside the time-honoured companion plantings of marigold and nasturtiums.

Inevitably with an event of such scale there are questions over the sustainability and ethical responsibility of the show's very existence. It is certainly a dilemma, and one that can be argued in many different ways, but to its credit the RHS is not shying away from the question and is actively promoting its goals through the show, emphasising the environmental aspects of gardens and the need to engage children and families.

The show will be full of ideas for environmentally sustainable and recycled alternatives to traditional garden features. Perhaps the most intriguing event at the show comes courtesy of the "underground" gardening group, Guerrilla Gardening, which will create its own show garden made entirely from the leftovers from other gardens.

In fact, very little will be going to waste at Hampton Court – even tools that are broken in the service of making the show will be collected, repaired and reused, making this year's show the greenest, and maybe the greatest ever.

