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Review

In the hunt for springtime?

The Southeastern Flower Show is hope chest of hidden treasure

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This year's Southeastern Flower Show is like the teenage girl who's finally passed that awkward stage and exudes poise, elegance and intrigue.

At 15, the Atlanta show, which continues through Sunday, is taking some much-needed risks. Perhaps that comes from the confidence in adjusting to the gargantuan space it moved to three years ago, the Atlanta Exposition Center.

The landscape designers have learned how to tame the high ceilings with tall trees, stage-set size structures and towering water features that force visitors to look up. The entry garden's live music sets winter-weary visitors in the mood for a garden party, while actors in the Atlanta History Center's cotton production exhibit engage them in chats that make the show more interactive. And new features, including specialty nursery displays such as the all-geranium offering from GardenSmith of Jefferson, keep the show fresh.

Sure, some things could always be better: The Southeast's largest horticultural event, benefiting the Atlanta Botanical Garden, needs to recruit more nationally acclaimed experts for speakers. Restroom facilities continue to be inadequate, forcing women to storm the men's rooms, leaving the guys to do rain dances in the hall. And noisy plywood ramps to the gardens prove a distracting way to enter these grand oases.

All in all, the event, dubbed "Garden Treasures," is something to behold. With that theme in mind, we went in the hunt for some real gems. Here's how we spell sheer *treasure*.

T

is for **troughs** and all the wonderful ways of using containers in the garden. Show newcomers the Brookfield Co. and English Garden Troughs team up to create a south Appalachian foothills garden made of little more than troughs, pots and other containers but jampacked with plants. It won best in show for small gardens.

R

as in **rooftops**. The Atlanta Botanical Garden's noncompetitive exhibit, a greenroof, offers visitors a "wake-up call" as one judge put it, for conserving our natural resources. Planting the rooftops of urban buildings with heat-tolerant plants reduces the heat the buildings give off while reducing storm water runoff.

E

is for **eye-catching** displays, such as Atlanta designer John Jeffers' gigantic teapot and cup outside the Ritz-Carlton Atlanta's Tearoom. At 15 feet, this teapot is far from short and stout. The

pot and cup are made of forged steel and stuffed with masses of bright green moss. Dry ice steaming from the cup makes this display sizzle.

A

is for **accessories**. The backbone of any show is horticulture, but displays of single blooms and branches do little to draw in crowds. This year, a balcony category was added, which accents this area. The balconies show plants that can be used for a variety of exposures. This one, designed by Susan Muller, is for north-facing buildings.

S

Think **splash**. Water features are common at the show, but in their garden, Pond Doc's Water Garden Center and Blades & Blossoms create a dramatic waterfall which, with its movement and sound, draws eyes upward. Water cascades over four plexiglass panels covering an arbor and into a pond with the biggest koi we've ever seen.

U

as in **unusual** attention to detail. Detail, color, texture are what great gardens are all about. Demonstrating just how far you can take it in a small space is Friends of the Garden's exhibit. Designer Robin Williams combines water features, stones, groundcovers and moss for a garden inspired by the book "Earth Prayers From Around the World."

R

Remembering Sept. 11 is a persistent theme at the show. In the "Creative Heads" competition is this Statue of Liberty design by Trudy Hughes and Sharon Ansley of the Cherokee Garden Club. The bust, made of eucalyptus leaves, globosa and hydrangea, makes for "a crowning glory but a bad hair day," the judges said.

E

is for **education**, the heart of the show. The Georgia Perennial Plant Association's exhibit, designed by Brooks Garcia of Fine Gardens, illustrates our climate's year-round opportunities for gardening, from sowing seeds inside the Blue Door Cottage to growing plants outside in a cold frame. The garden won the education division's top award.

SOUTHEASTERN FLOWER SHOW

- **Show hours:** 9:30 a.m.-8:30 p.m. today, 9:30-6 p.m. Sunday.
- **Location:** Atlanta Exposition Center, 3650 Jonesboro Road S.E. (Exit 55 off I-285).
- **Admission:** \$15 adults; \$5 ages 4-16. Guided tours with a show expert, including parking, \$35.
- **Information:** 404-888-5638, www.flowershow.org.

Top award winners

The judges have spoken.

Look for the ribbons as you navigate the Southeastern Flower Show for what 160 experts from across the country deem praiseworthy. The judges spent most of Tuesday evaluating thousands

of entries in horticulture, garden design, photography and education exhibits. Some divisions got a second round of scrutiny on Friday.

Here are some of the show's top awards. The sweepstakes awards will be announced at the close of the show.

LANDSCAPE

- Atlanta Botanical Garden Trustees Award for Best in Show: Large gardens: Tie, Atlanta Water Gardens, HighGrove Partners; medium gardens: Alex Smith Garden Design; small gardens: The Brookfield Co./ English Garden Troughs

EDUCATION

- Governor's Trophy: Georgia Perennial Plant Association
- The Bulkey Medal: Atlanta History Center
- Certificate of Excellence in Conservation -- Garden Club of America: Nature Conservancy of America
- Magnolia Garden Club Scholarship Trophy: Chattahoochee Nature Center
- Atlanta Botanical Garden Blue Ribbon Certificate of Excellence: Piedmont Park Conservancy

HORTICULTURE

- Northwood Garden Club Trophy: Vera Wells
- Species Trophy: Kara Zeigler
- Habersham Garden Club President's Trophy: Virginia Almand
- Ann Equen Ballard Award, first judging: Michael Redgrave; second judging: Virginia Almand

ARTISTIC

- Peachtree Garden Club Trophy, first judging: Marcia Robinson, Betty Balentine; second judging: Judith Bradley, Sylvia Summers
- Pine Tree Garden Club Trophy, first, second judgments: Judith Bradley, Sylvia Summers