

Carole Massey-Rowan County Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator

March 14, 2007

Philadelphia Flower Show

I have not been to Ireland, but I feel as though I came close. When I walked under the massive stone arch, supported on either side with huge stones etched with intricate Celtic designs, I was greeted by a "living" Pan, a woodland sprite, who clicked and clacked his way through the Ealain Wood and disappeared into the forest.

The entire Pennsylvania Convention Center was a feast for plant lovers. Garden designs reflected Irish folklore and the flora and fauna of the Emerald Isle. There were major exhibits, huge quantities of stone arranged for waterfalls and ponds. Berms and trees that topped thirty feet or more drew the eye upward. Miniature elf houses had the crowd on their knees trying to see through the tiny window panes, past the Irish lace curtains.

The Knot Garden with the lire centerpiece had water flowing from the top of a conical planter with intricate designs all around. Patterns were abundant, symbolism everywhere. Ireland's forests were well represented with huge redwood trees, linden and smoke trees depicting ancient times. A golden pine was featured in the "Garden of Gold" along with golden junipers, spirea, forsythia, rose and other perennials. Native ferns, grasses, shrubs and introduced species such as rhododendrons and azaleas were prevalent. Orchids, hellebores, primroses, English daisies, daffodils, tulips and masses and masses of lilies colored the designs.

The major exhibits were just one component of this marvelous show. This is one of the largest flower shows in the United States. There was a question and answer booth, manned by representatives of the Philadelphia Horticulture Society, the sponsor of this long running extravaganza. There were single specimen exhibits of any and all plant material competing against one another for a coveted PHS ribbon. This is a true flower show with arrangements in all categories, such as miniature, window box, hanging container, and the larger container arrangements. There were patio rooms, terraces and entry ways, pedestal arrangements, jewelry and pressed plants. All were skillfully arranged to showcase their floral components which typically had an Irish theme. There were quantities of Bells of Ireland, oxalis and lilies. Shades of green and white were prevalent. The foremost color of containers, the most striking, was royal blue. Tall, low, short, squat, round, slender, all blue.

In the section of the show called Grow It, the focus was on orchids. Hundreds of orchids were on display; every variety, every color all striking in their own beauty and uniqueness. Orchids also played a major role in the display gardens.

If in need of a break, there were ongoing lectures during the day with many educational speakers and topics. The variety was endless, from "Heirloom Bulbs for the Garden Today: Unique, Endangered Amazing" to "Sifting Irish Plant Lore: Sweet Peas, Potatoes and Peat".

Then there were the vendors. What gardener could go to an inspiring flower show without looking for something new and different to take home? The variety was staggering. Nurseries with plants attractively displayed with knowledgeable, friendly folks to encourage your purchase. All the "new" technology in grow lights and heating pads with a user friendly setup to view. Seed companies had the most colorful displays, with package upon package of wonder. The catalogues were works of art and in great demand. The temperature that morning in Philadelphia was 2* wind-chill. Gardening was being done on a wishful basis indoors and all of this gave the crowds much to look forward to.

My fondest memories will be of the hellebores and the wee little houses in the glenn with the tee-tiny laundry hung out to dry. This was quite an experience, "Legends of Ireland".