

Royal Putrajaya Floria 2016

The show this year featured **CHRYSANTHEMUM** as its theme and attracted over 700,000 visitors.

By Elaine Yim

The Royal Floria Putrajaya (‘Floria 2016’) is Malaysia’s largest flower and garden festival. It began in 2007 as a biennial event under the name of Putrajaya Floria and became an annual event after 2010. It was conferred royal status in 2014. The event is hosted by Putrajaya Corporation (Perbadanan Putrajaya or PPj) in collaboration with the Federal Territories Ministry, Tourism Malaysia, and Ministry of Tourism & Culture. It is managed by Putrajaya Floria Sdn Bhd, a wholly owned subsidiary of PPj.

This year’s Floria is its 9th edition. The event lasted nine days from 9 am on Friday, 27th May to midnight on Saturday, 4th June 2016. By 3rd June, the recorded number of visitors had reached 736,450

Theme flower **CHRYSANTHEMUM**

The theme flower this year was **CHRYSANTHEMUM**. Chrysanthemums are popular as festival flowers especially for Chinese New Year, Wesak Day, Deepavali, Thaipusam, Qing Ming and All Souls Day. Chrysanthemums have been cultivated in China for 2,500 years and have inspired many renowned Chinese poems and paintings. In Japan, chrysanthemums are known as “kiku-no-hana”. Japan’s imperial emblem is a 16-petalled chrysanthemum flower. Chrysanthemum or “mum” in short, is native to East Asia.



Royal Floria Putrajaya entrance



The Johor Royal Garden display.

Today, the thousands of hybrids and cultivars are classified according to different bloom forms such as irregular, irregular, intermediate, incurved,

Displays in the Candy Courtyard



reflex, decorative, pompom, single, anemone, spoon, quill, spider, brush or thistle and exotic. More than 140 varieties of chrysanthemums have been awarded the Royal Horticultural Society's Award for Garden Merit.

At this year's event I had the golden opportunity to interview and learn from two professional experts, Eric Wong and Caroline Loo, both of whom played important roles in Floria 2016, particularly in the organization of the Floral Pavilion and the Candy Courtyard of Chrysanthemum Garden.

The Candy Courtyard

I think this was the most photographed section. Many different varieties of Malaysian-grown chrysanthemums were showcased here. There was a plethora of chrysanthemums in different colours, shapes and sizes. Here one could see many exhibition varieties with spectacular blooms. There were single-stalked mums with large flower heads, spray forms with multiple blooms, and compact-type daisy-heads, buttons and pom-poms. The chrysanthemums were exhibited as standalones or grouped closely together, arranged into hanging balls, cascades, towers and even shaped like a choo-choo-train. At the centre was a giant Candy Castle. Fanciful toy elephants, golliwog on a bicycle, spinning pin-wheels, colourful butterflies, beetles, nursery-rhyme frogs and spiders were added to create fairy-tale fantasy and magic.

According to Mr Eric Wong, all the chrysanthemums displayed were sourced from Cameron Highlands. Currently Malaysia is the 4th largest exporter of cut chrysanthemums in

the world and ranks number one in Asia. The flowers are mostly exported to Japan and some to Singapore.

Some cultivars are fully exported and not sold here. Buyers need to make prior arrangements with the growers to supply them locally. These special cultivars are propagated from cuttings taken from mother plants that originated from Japan and are kept here for propagation purposes.

For Floria 2016, the quantity and specific types of chrysanthemum flowers were decided in advance, and an order was placed with the growers in Cameron Highlands. It was necessary to give them a lead time of 6 months. It takes at least 4.5 months for chrysanthemums to be propagated from cuttings, and grown to maturity. Some varieties flower earlier while others take longer to mature.

How do the growers induce chrysanthemums to flower at the right time?

If you visit Cameron Highlands, you will see that some flower farms are lighted up at night to prolong the daily daylight exposure by 4 to 5 hours. Under such conditions, the plants will be tricked to continue growing and delay flowering. Any flower buds that develop early will be pinched off. When the plants reach the required height, the lights will not be turned on anymore and so they will start to flower. For single big-head chrysanthemums, all extra buds are pinched off leaving only a single terminal bud. This way, the flower produced will be bigger and prettier. Chrysanthemums can withstand sunny weather but too much rain can damage the plants.

Floral Pavillion

The Floral Pavilion was the indoor, fully air-conditioned section which showcased creative floral arrangements by local and international floral designers from China, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Macau, Malaysia, Netherlands, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand. The designers competed for the Floria Cup, Floral Pavilion Awards and Flower Ambassador Awards. The categories competed included wall art, animated flower sculpture, mixture floral garden, wedding event display, mini garden, floral collage, team masterpiece, international designer display and body flower. At the Embassy Row, the exhibitors included the Embassy of Ecuador showcasing Ecuadorian roses and the International Horticulture Goyang Korea, showcasing air-plants.

According to Caroline Loo the planning and organizing took about 9 months. Certain themes like the floral body fashion, head-dress and wedding displays have been repeated annually due to popular demand. From these exhibits, the public can get inspiration and ideas to apply for themselves. There were lots of valuable ideas from the international participants who were all very experienced and qualified.

Floral students gain practical experience on a bigger scale at Floria as compared to their daily routines at florist shops and schools. Teachers led and guided the students to put up the displays. The preparation may take months but exhibitors only have three days to set up their displays inside the Floral Pavilion. Due to time constraints, participants work late into the night or early hours of the morning to complete their works. The materials such as fresh flowers,



Floral skirt by Surene Fong May Leng made of ladies fingers, red chilies, green spider chrysanthemums and white pom-pom chrysanthemums

fruits and vegetables needed are pre-planned and sourced one month in advance.

The flowers need to be replaced almost every day as they tend to dry up fast under air-conditioning. To do this, they have to wait until Floria closes at 10:30 pm or midnight to start their maintenance work and by the time they are finished, it is already 4 or 5 am.

Caroline is also one of the judges for the Floria Cup which also includes international judges. She explains that the qualities they look for in winning entries are teamwork, technique,

texture, content, refinement, composition, visual presentation, degree of difficulty, public response and attention to detail.

Special gardens

Under the Special Gardens category, I found the entry of the KL City Council (Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur or DBKL) to be the most enchanting. This outdoor landscaped garden was named “Buds of Enchantment” and it was designed by Muhammad Hafiz Zainal. He obtained his inspiration from the Hollywood movies titled “The Chronicles of Narnia” and put together a fantasy garden experience. The experience begins with visitors being greeted with a big brown wardrobe in an arid farm setting. The wardrobe is the entrance to a “Frozen Wood” area with Winter in full force and pure white snow falling from the sky. It was an enchanting experience to come face-to-face with real-life characters from Narnia such as Mr Tumnus, Susan and Edmund Pevensie and Jadis the White Witch. Next was a Spring season setting called “Easter Eggs” with life-sized Easter bunnies prancing about and colourful clowns playing with each other. Further in, there was a “Fantasy Forest” with mermaids dancing to music, perched on a rock by a flowing river. Occasionally a King and Queen strolled by. This display won for DBKL this year’s Floria Putrajaya Garden Cup and also the Outstanding Garden Award. This is the 4th year in DBKL’s Floria award-winning history.

School and University gardens

A total of 1,200 people comprising of school students, undergraduates, teachers and lecturers from 19 primary, 19 secondary schools and 15



A giant clam by Limkokwing University of Creative Technology.

universities took part in the School & University Gardens outdoor landscaped garden and wall art contests.

The Limkokwing University of Creative Technology won 5 awards, namely the Garden Gold Award, Garden Starlight Silver Award, Garden Competition Creative Award under the Schools & Universities category, the Bronze Award for their Time Capsule design under the Wall Art Category and the Silver Award for the Poster Competition. The winning team was made up of 35 students from the Faculty of Architecture & Built Environment and the Faculty of Design Innovation.

Some personal observations

- It was good that the opening ceremony was held on Special Preview Day on the eve of the start of Floria 2016. This enabled the media to provide better coverage and helped to reduce over-crowding on opening day.

- Ticket sales started well in advance of the opening and there was an option to purchase online. The booths were situated on spacious land across the road. This reduced the congestion near the entrance.
- The open-air locations were very hot under the afternoon sun. Despite applying sunblock, I still suffered from sunburn. Young children and the elderly would have found the day's outing to Floria very exhausting. Also, many flowers displayed outdoors suffered in the heat. More shade trees should be planted to provide a cooler outdoor environment for future shows.
- The ground at certain locations gets soggy and slippery after rain or after watering of plants. Raised walkways would have helped.
- The Bazaar and Horticultural Market area was within the fenced up area, which made repeat shopping a hassle because each entry required a new ticket. It would be better not to fence up this area. Moreover, one may have to park at quite a distance away, so an arrangement is needed so that drivers can pick up heavy purchases more easily.



Floral butterfly by Tan Bee Lee



Display by SK Convert (M) Kajang primary school

