

Epcot's Flower and Garden Festival: Blooming to Life with Fun!

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Every spring, **Walt Disney World blossoms into life** - and nowhere can that be seen more vividly than at Epcot.

It is home to the **Epcot Flower and Garden Festival**, and it's an event with something for everyone.

Disney in the spring was a new concept to me until last year. Usually we visit Walt Disney World in the wintertime, particularly at Christmas, when all the decorations are on show and additional festive events make visiting extra special.

Having gotten used to enjoying all those additional Christmas events during our previous stays, I was keen to continue to get something more for our Disney admission price, so I started to look at what other events take place throughout the year. The Flower and Garden Festival, which runs from April 5-June 3 (2007 dates), immediately caught my attention.

Centered around Epcot, our favorite park, I was instantly transfixed by the photos I found online of the flower beds in Future World and the various topiaries throughout the entire park. Never before had I seen such a stunning floral display - and my parents are exceptionally keen gardeners. I grew up surrounded by a garden, which was home to 2,000 flowers in bloom every summer and which used to stun and amaze everyone who visited us.

But would the reality of the Flower & Garden Festival live up to the hype? When we first set foot in Epcot on a fairly busy Saturday morning in early May, I will admit that I had my doubts. The photos had sent my expectations soaring sky high, but despite this, everything we saw was exactly how I'd pictured it.

Topiaries welcome you first in front of Spaceship Earth and are scattered throughout the park. Some are old favorites and have been featuring in the Festival for many years, such as the trolls in Norway and the pandas playing in China, while others change each year. On my first visit, guests were greeted by Mickey, Minnie, Donald, Pluto and Goofy together, highlighting the Magical Gatherings celebrations, while a new topiary of Tinker Bell took pride of place just in front of Spaceship Earth. Each year the topiaries in the front of the park change. In 2011, topiaries of Toy Story 3 appear, including Buzz, Woody,

and Lotso! You'll also spot Mickey, Minnie, Donald, Daisy, Pluto, Stitch, Winnie the Pooh, and Cars 2 topiaries throughout the park, but the Festival is about so much more than just topiaries.

Flowers are scattered everywhere throughout the park, but for me, the highlights from last year were the amazing flower beds between Future World and World Showcase. A riot of color, featuring Mickey and flower shapes, these are planted out overnight, in just an eight-hour period. The turf is cut beforehand in preparation and the planting schedule is computer generated, so that the Disney gardeners know exactly where every flower needs to be planting.

These were just some of the fascinating facts that we discovered on our backstage tour, exploring the work that goes into the Flower and Garden Festival. As this was to be our first visit to the Flower and Garden Festival, we booked ourselves on to the Garden Discovery Tour. This three-hour tour (9:00 am - noon) is essentially a special Festival version of the Gardens of the World tour, which runs year round at Epcot. A Disney Horticulturist give you the inside scoop on the special displays and award-winning international gardens. Costing \$59, there are discounts available for both Annual Passholders and Disney Vacation Club members, although it is worth bearing in mind that the tour name varies from year to year. This year, it is called Epcot Garden Explorations.

The tour guides are Disney gardeners, who can go into as much detail as you want about the various plants and flowers used in the displays and how each is created. Some of the topiary are temporary and are destroyed just weeks after the Festival ends. Even the permanent topiaries only have a lifetime of seven years and once the frames can no longer be used, they are melted down.

If you're not at Disney World over Mother's Day weekend, don't despair. There is plenty going on throughout the six weeks of the Festival. Everywhere you look in Epcot, there are things to see and do. The fragrance garden in France will astound you when you find out what actually goes into some of your favorite perfumes, while Farmer Mickey's Maze on the Imagination Walkway (replacing the DogGone Maze of the past couple of years) is aimed at children between the ages of two and five, but the topiaries within it can be admired by all ages. Don't miss Bambi's Butterfly House filled with hundreds of butterflies, and the Pixie Hollow Fairy Garden where you can meet some of your favorite faires in person daily between 9:30 and 5:15 pm.

If all this fires your imagination and you want to return home to create water features and topiaries in your own garden, then help is on hand

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from the Master Gardeners from IFAS at the University of Florida. And on certain days throughout the Festival, you can enjoy interactive demonstrations at 11:00 am, noon, 2:00 pm, and 3:00 pm at the Festival Center inside the former Wonders of Life pavilion.

But the Festival isn't all about Flowers and Gardens, despite its name. It also features a liberal dose of "Flower Power," with concerts every night at the America Gardens Theater taking you back in time to the 1960s and 1970s. With three shows nightly at 5:15 pm, and 7:45 pm, this year's line-up includes Chubby Checker, Juice Newton, Paul Revere & The Raiders, The Guess Who, Starship, Davy Jones, Ricky Nelson, and Herman's Hermits.

Then there are the theme weekends, including "Fresh From Florida" (April 29-May 1), which lets you discover Florida's natural bounty with featured growers are available to chat about fresh items from throughout the state, including produce and honey. The following weekend (May 13-15) is a Disney-Pixar Weekend to Celebrate Cars 2, which debuts in theaters on June 24, 2011. Kids will love the Cars 2-themed scavenger hunt around World Showcase.

The Festival showcases Epcot at its brightest and best. It's fun and full of activities, with lots of extras to see and do. For full details of the events being planned for the annual Epcot Flower and Garden Festival, which runs from March 2 - May 15, 2011, visit the [special events section of the Walt Disney World web site](#) or call 407-WDISNEY.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

Article last updated: 04-16-2011

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