

A growing trend

Drought-resistant varieties were stars of Melbourne's international plant show, writes CHERYL MADDOCKS.

It's flowers and frock time in Victoria, with the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show in March following hot on the stylish heels of the Melbourne Fashion Festival.

While gardens might not be as glamorous as gowns, they can certainly pull a crowd. More than 110,000 flora fans saw the show – several thousand more than last year. People of all ages poured into the beautiful Carlton Gardens, proving gardening is more popular than ever.

Inspiration, ideas and just plain fun were the drawcards and gardeners came from all over the country to see what they could

adapt to their own situations. They also came to find out about the latest garden gadgets, accessories and water tanks.

The show's landscape displays reflected the themes of sustainability and the importance of plants for our health and the planet's future.

The event manager for show co-ordinator IMG, Kathleen Rushford, said the awards this year "acknowledged the combination of plant choices that support sustainable gardening and inspirational landscape design".

The best-in-show award went to "Our Plants Our Planet" by Tree and Shrub Growers Victoria. This display emphasised the role plants play in the planet's health and featured a selection of inspired garden designs from Australia, Bali, Africa, England, Japan, New Zealand and the Mediterranean.

Another standout was a stunning curved garden called "The Wave" by Paal Grant Designs in Landscaping. Grant's inspiration came from his love of the Australian coastline.

The recent drought ensured the majority of plants in the show gardens were water-wise. Fabulous mixes of succulents, grasses, dianellas, cannas, pelargoniums,

cordylines, liriopie, flax, rosemary, kangaroo paws (pictured) and other natives featured widely.

The "grow your own" trend was evident. Oasis Horticulture won gold for its eye-catching display of vegetables, herbs and flowers.

Fabian Capomolla from Melbourne's Little Veggie Patch Co (littleveggiepatchco.com.au) offered some hope for the future. His company specialises in building, planting and maintaining vegetable gardens. Capomolla said that, apart from restaurants wanting fresh herbs, his biggest clients were mothers aged in their 30s. They want to show their children where food comes from.

"Grow your own" enthusiasts were especially interested in pots designed for growing vegetables in small spaces. GreenSmart pots (greensmartpots.com) come in sizes suitable for herbs and vegetables. Time-poor gardeners will love these self-watering pots, which have indicators telling you when you need to top them up.

EzyGrow pots (ezygrow.com.au) also attracted attention. These plastic pots are on stands, so you won't break your back tending to your edible delights.



●● It's time to

- Put these dates in your diary. The Margaret Flockton Award exhibition attracts the world's best botanical illustrators. April 9 to July 9 at the Red Box Gallery, National Herbarium of NSW, Mrs Macquaries Road, Sydney. For more information, phone 9231 8134, see www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au.

- The Botanica *Treasuring Our Plants - Treasuring Our Planet* exhibition showcases a spectacular collection of works by leading Australian botanical artists. Works are for sale. April 16 to 25 at the Lion Gate Lodge, Royal Botanic Gardens, Mrs Macquaries Road, Sydney.