

GRAHAMSTOWN FLOWER FESTIVAL

PRESS RELEASE

All garden pathways lead to flower festival

With the recent announcement that the newly-published coffee-table book *Veld, Vlei and Rose Gardens* will be launched at the Grahamstown Flower Festival, and the staging, for the first time, of an art exhibition, organisers are looking forward to a bumper festival this year.

The Grahamstown Flower Festival will be held in the Makana Botanical Gardens below the Monument over the weekend of October 29 and 30.

The book launch and art exhibition will supplement an already-full programme of festival events that include plant and flower competitions, children's plant and flower arrangement competition, workshops, lectures, commercial stalls displaying and selling garden-related items of all descriptions, as well as musical entertainment.

Festival convenor Sharon Richner exudes excitement when she speaks of this year's festival, saying it will be a hit with everyone owning a garden or having a love of plants and flowers. "There is something for everyone, with plenty of added colour and beautiful smells," she smiles.

However, the planning and organisation of the 2011 festival has not been without its occasional setback.

Richner says that the Bedford Garden Festival, also held at this time of year, had originally set a date for its event, and the

Grahamstown festival organising committee had set another date in order not to clash.

“However, the Bedford organisers then saw fit to change their original date and slotted it into the same weekend as our festival,” laments Richner. The move has resulted in a number of sponsors, refreshment providers and stallholders opting for the Bedford festival. Bedford has also been adversely affected by the clash, with eight of their regular stallholders choosing to come to Grahamstown.

Undeterred, Richner and her committee are pushing ahead, confident that the Makana Botanical Gardens will be buzzing with festive activity the last weekend of October. Nevertheless the Grahamstown Flower Festival organisers are grateful to their Bedford counterparts for including the Grahamstown event in their advertising material.

Understandably then, Richner is delighted that the *Veld, Vlei & Rose Gardens* book will be launched during the Grahamstown Flower Festival, particularly as local rose fancier and grower Vernon Marais and his Arequipa estate are featured on its pages.

Marais will be present at the launch, and he is planning to enter blooms in the rose section of the flower competition once again.

A group of local artists will have works on display at the art exhibition, bringing further radiant colour to the festival with paintings of landscapes and flora.

The ever-popular plant and flower competition has classes catering for gardeners whose speciality may be container plants, roses, cut flowers, proteas, indigenous plants, orchids, herbs, and vegetables.

There is also a flower and plant arrangement section for children, and this always draws a large entry where the younger ones allow their imaginations to run freely.

Tanya Visser, editor of *The Gardener* magazine, withdrew as a guest speaker at the last minute last year due to family reasons, but she will be here this year, speaking on “New trends, eco-gardening and getting the most out of your garden”.

She is one of two speakers lined up this year, the other being David Davidson, who has won many gold awards at the Chelsea Flower Show with the Kirstenbosch exhibit. He will deliver two talks: “The Chelsea Experience – South Africa blooms abroad” and “Floral festivals in the Far East”.

Another popular aspect of the flower festival is the hands-on workshops where participants are afforded the opportunity to develop new skills.

In “Indigenous medicinal plants and basic phytotherapy treatments” by Don Green, participants will be introduced to the medicinal properties and applications of mainly Eastern Cape medicinal plants.

Warren Lange’s “Fun with plants” workshop is aimed at children who will learn basic horticultural concepts, while Elmarie Retief’s “Say it with Pizzazz” will introduce participants to ways of using flowers and recyclable items for adding that special touch of pizzazz to gifts, flower arrangements and interior décor.

The “Bug Busters” workshop by Rob O’Donoghue will explore methods of preventing insects from becoming pests in the garden.

Such is the high profile of the guest speakers and quality of the workshops on offer that tickets are already selling for these.

Tickets are available from Cathy Braans and Lindsay Vroom at 24 African Street (phone 046 622 7896/7).

In the midst of all the lectures, workshops, art exhibition, flower competitions and commercial stalls are the ever-popular and essential refreshment outlets. These are being well-catered for, Richner assures prospective festival goers. Mary-Jane Moodie, who runs the Fresh Mint tea garden at Sunnyside Garden Centre, will move her operation to the Botanical Gardens for the duration of the festival, while well-known local caterer Esme Basola will be there too, running the Festival Restaurant. Old favourites Rotary will be there as well, selling their famous kudu burgers.

Richner explains that the flower festival has exclusive rights to the Botanical Gardens over the weekend; thus, all persons entering the gardens will be regarded as festival goers and be required to pay entrance fees.

But the activities of the Grahamstown Flower Festival are not confined to the Botanical Gardens. All across town, homeowners and gardeners have been busy for weeks preparing for the *Gardens of Grahamstown* competition, presented and sponsored by Pam Golding Properties.

The competition covers four categories – small, medium, large and township gardens – and handsome cash prizes will be awarded to the category winners, and hamper prizes to the runners-up.

For garden competition entry forms visit Pam Golding Properties at 51 African Street – entries close on Friday, October 7.

The festival website www.grahamstownflowerfestival.co.za carries a wealth of information on all aspects of the festival.