

GARDEN



Have you ...

started seeds for long-season vegetables such as eggplant, peppers and tomatoes? They will take six to eight weeks to get tall and strong enough to transplant in mid-May.

Elements of beauty

A spirited garden takes root in the fertile ground of Mexican heritage and design

By Beth Botts | TRIBUNE REPORTER

People live in their own worlds, and often those worlds never meet. But when they do, sometimes magic happens.

Juxtapose, for example, water-garden designers in Burr Ridge who knew little about Mexico and curators at a Mexican art museum who knew nothing about flower shows.

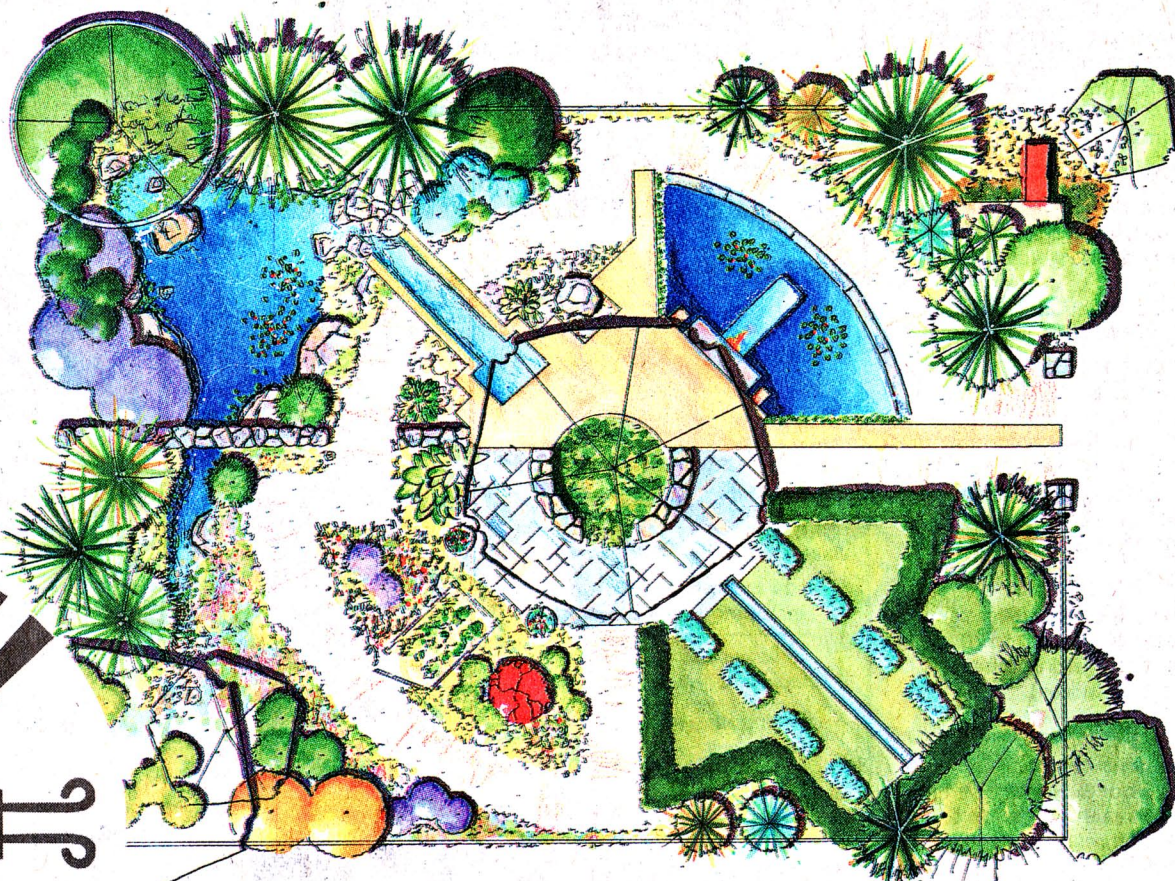
Add talk, exploration and imagination. Get a garden that spans the distant history of Mesoamerica and today's Chicago, ancient aqueducts and bold modern architecture, *Tropicalismo* and Zone 5 plants, rain and sun, dark and light, water and fire. And place it in a make-believe world with real flowers where you walk from a gray March outdoors to an indoors where all of a sudden it's spring.

All the exhibits at the Chicago Flower & Garden Show, which opened Saturday at Navy Pier, are theatrical creations, whipped up in a few days from piled-up mulch, plants in hidden pots and months of meticulous planning and prepara-



ration. How well these illusions succeed at whirling us away to another world is up to the designers and builders. And usually they have been at it for more than four months.

But it was only Dec. 5 when Frank and Chris Kane, who own Kane Brothers Water Features (kanebros.com), and staff landscape designer Angelo Zielinski



The plan of "Del Agua Viene la Vida" is based on the traditional Mesoamerican motif at left.
KANE BROTHERS ILLUSTRATION

first met with Cesareo Moreno, visual arts director and curator, and other staff from the National Museum of Mexican Art in Pilsen (nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org). They had been teamed up by Tony Abruscato, president of the flower show, to complete a lineup of Chicago cultural institutions and landscape designers who are creating gardens for this year's show.

None of the non-gardening museum staff had ever been to a flower show. But as they listened, Moreno says, they realized "this is so much

like what we do here at the museum. It's a large-scale temporary exhibition, where you just want people to be lost."

The Kanes and Zielinski already had toured the museum, soaking in 1,500-year-old ceramics, richly colored rugs, allegorical paintings. They already knew all about the art and struggle of flower show exhibits, having partnered on a substantial installation with Celtic Gardens in 2006. From Moreno and his staff, they heard about the flowers and animals that are so prominent in Mexican art, the range of the 2,000-mile-long coun-

try's geography and biodiversity, the variety of its cultures and the rich tapestry of beliefs among its indigenous peoples.

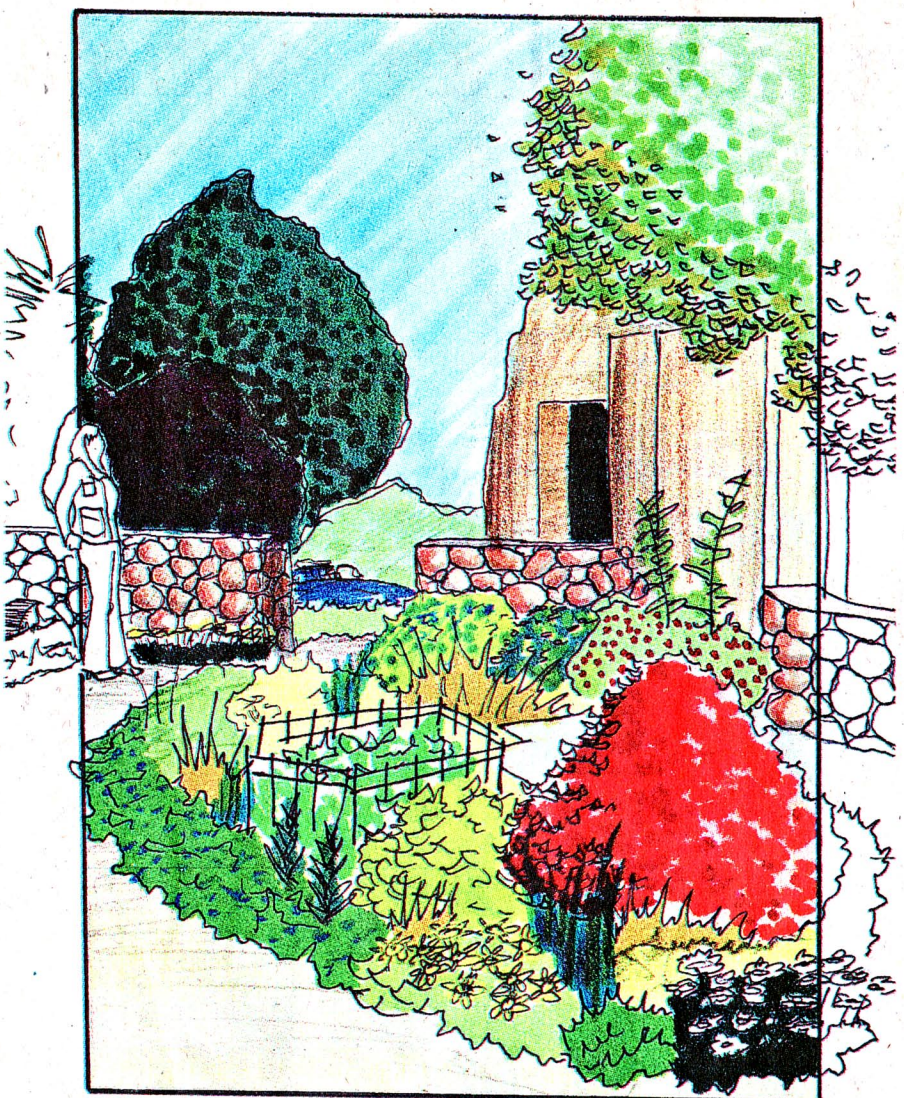
Out of those discussions, and a visit to the Aztec exhibit at the Field Museum, emerged a plan based on one of the most basic ideas of pre-conquista Mexico: the contrast and balance between light and dark, male and female, sun and rain, the material world and the spirit world, captured in a traditional rug-weaving motif.

In the garden, "there's a lot of duality between formal and natural, old and new, all tied together

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A part of the garden evokes the rural landscape of Mexico, including a vegetable garden. KANE BROTHERS ILLUSTRATION

with the theme of water," Chris Kane says. It's divided roughly into quarters: One that portrays how aqueducts brought fresh water to the island city of Tenochtitlán (on the site of Mexico City); one that evokes the traditional farming and rural landscape; one that nods to the formal and elegant gardens since the Spanish conquest; and one that picks up on the sharp lines and bold colors of modern Mexican architects such as Luis Barragan (www.barragan-foundation.org).

The exhibit is named "Del Agua Viene la Vida" ("From Water Comes Life"). Its plans, preparations and plant list have their own Web site: fromwatercomeslife.com.

Another aspect of duality: south-of-the-border landscapes with Chicago-hardy plants. "We wanted to be true to the culture, to try to create the feeling with the materials, but we wanted to use Midwestern materials," Kane says. So though the style of the exhibit hearkens to Mexico, most of the plants

could pop up in your garden: coral bells, cardinal flower, bluestar, Jacob's ladder, Virginia bluebells, cinnamon fern, an Autumn Blaze Freeman maple.

This startled Moreno, who expected the exhibit to feature the plants he knows from Mexican art. But it grew on him: "Even that idea is indigenous," he says. "It's about respecting the land that you came from. And it's about understanding that you are part of this land."

But it's not easy getting winter-dormant Zone 5 plants to do their thing in March, especially on short notice, Kane says. Large shrubs and good-size trees had to be dug up and moved indoors to coax them out of dormancy—but first, the frozen soil had to be melted with blowtorches.

How well did they, and the idea of a Mexican landscape in a Chicago exhibit hall, leaf out? This is the week to find out at Navy Pier.

ebotts@tribune.com



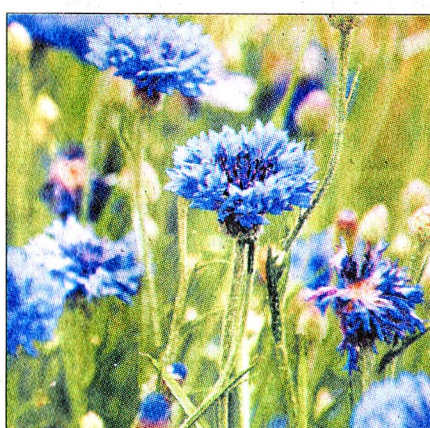
Ligularia stenocephala 'The Rocket.' THE MORTON ARBORETUM PHOTO



Echinacea 'Sundown.' ITSAUL PLANTS PHOTO



Heuchera 'Key Lime Pie.' PROVEN WINNERS PHOTO



Centaurea 'Jubilee Gem.' TRIBUNE PHOTO 2007

Show highlights

For several of the Chicago Flower & Garden Show exhibits this year, Chicago-area cultural institutions have partnered with prominent design firms. Here are some highlights:

"GeoGarden": Riffing on the ideas of visionary architect Buckminster Fuller are the Museum of Contemporary Art and Hoerr Schaudt Landscape Architects of Chicago.

"Greening Up": The Chicago Park District Conservatories exhibit is all about vines and other strategies for making a garden out of a vertical surface, such as a city garage wall.

"Hope for Healing the Planet": The Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe and Mariani Landscape in Lake Bluff collaborate on three circular rooftop gardens that offer ideas for more sustainable gardening.

"Nature Boardwalk": The Brickman Group of Chicago designs a preview of plans to revamp the area around the Lincoln Park Zoo's lagoon as a nature sanctuary.

"Reflections: A Spirited Garden of Asian Inspiration": Rich's Foxwillow Pines of Woodstock, Midwest Bamboo of Wheaton and Midwest Groundcovers in St. Charles create a serene oasis.

"Rooftop Garden of the Future": Chicago Specialty Gardens and other collaborators imagine living and gardening space on a Chicago rooftop.

"Science in Bloom": A whimsical garden, concocted by Jacobs Ryan Associates and Christy Webber Landscapes of Chicago, evokes four of the Museum of Science and Industry's signature exhibits: the U505 submarine, the Chick Hatchery, the Smart Home Green+Wired and the Pioneer Zephyr train.

"Sustainable Gardens for a Changing World": Aquascape Designs in St. Charles, West End Florist in Evanston and other collaborators create a garden about saving and recycling water.

"WaterShedd": The Shedd Aquarium and Roy Diblik of Northwind Perennial Farm in Burlington, Wis., team up on a xeriscape garden—one that would require little or no watering.

Also find: Gardens from the Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences, the Garden Clubs of Illinois and the Wicker Park Garden Club; gardens featuring gazebos and stonework; University of Chicago Extension Master Gardeners to answer questions; a kids' activity garden; vendors of home and garden products; floral design exhibits; and more.

—Beth Botts

CHICAGO FLOWER & GARDEN SHOW

Where: Navy Pier, 600 E. Grand Ave.

When: March 7 through 15

Hours: 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sundays

Cost: Adults, \$14 week-ends, \$12 weekdays; children 12 and under, \$5. Group discounts available.

Parking: \$14 all day

Highlight: The Chicago Tribune's garden writer Beth Botts will be speaking on "Beauty and the Plastic Beast: Your Plants, Where They Come From and Why It Matters" from 12:30 to 1:15 p.m. Saturday.

Information and tickets: chicagoflower.com, 773-435-1250.