

## Features

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## Bringing the Sexy Back to Gardening

*Heidi Lindberg*

Numerous recent studies have shown that “gardening” has been given a bad rap. How do we as an industry convince American consumers that gardening can be easy and fun? One way is by demonstrating how they can use our products to decorate their homes and augment their lives.

The Philadelphia Flower Show, which was held in March 2017, tore through those negative stigmas, leaving show-goers amazed and wanting more. The Philadelphia Flower Show was established in 1829 and is the largest indoor display in the world, covering 10 acres in the main exhibit hall. This year’s theme was “Holland: Flowering the World,” which was sure to satisfy the eye’s desire for splashes of color. One woman described it as a complete “sensory overload.”

We need to show consumers that gardening is an art, a science, and most importantly—COOL. For me, five elements “brought the sexy back” to gardening for the consumer at the 2017 Philadelphia Flower Show.

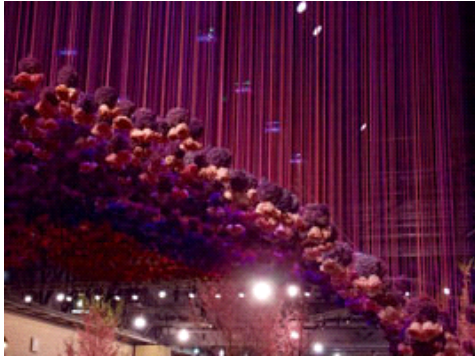
### Multi-Sensory Experience

The entrance of the floral show offered guests a multisensory experience. Flower show attendees entered to see a bridge, complete with planters and bicycles, surrounded by tulips and daffodils in full bloom, with a green wall on the interior of the bridge. Behind the bridge were large windmills, reflected in a water feature surrounded by yet more daffodils. Approximately every 30 minutes, consumers entering the show would stop in their tracks to marvel at a light and sound show. Music pulsed through people’s ears and they were excited to see the flowers lit up with different colors of strobe lights.



Directly behind these displays was the “Eco-dome” where consumers learned about sustainability. Inside, attendees could see a beehive provided by Koppert Biological Systems, leafy greens illuminated with red LED lighting and even taste freshly-picked microgreens. The multisensory experience connected visitors to

the dynamic horticultural displays in front of them.



## Gravity-Defying Floral Design

An inverted floral display featuring rosettes of dried flowers offered the guests the feeling of Keukenhof, which is a garden in the Netherlands that displays more than 7 million tulips, daffodils and hyacinths. Guests enjoyed the rainbow of color floating over their heads.

Another large floral display, “Pedals,” featured 250 white bicycles hanging from the ceiling supporting an array of orange blossoms reaching towards the floor. The display was in honor of the White Bike Plan, a community-shared bicycle system that began during the mid-1960s in Amsterdam. The white bicycles were in stark contrast to the bright orange orchids and mums in the display.

Another gravity-defying floral display was “Bulb,” centrally located in the exhibit hall. It featured different types and shapes of incandescent bulbs glowing near the tulips and amaryllis. The amaryllis was hung inverted over a table and lushly decorated with tulips, surrounded by orange and lime-green low table arrangements.



## Ornamental Plants Sell a Posh Lifestyle

If visitors still hadn’t concluded that horticulture could be awesome, floral designers in the tablescape category intrigued attendees with lavish place settings. Many of the arrangements offered both high and low elements and even featured fruits in their designs. These floral arrangements sold guests a lavish lifestyle and demonstrated how to use color to spruce up the most drab dining areas. The explosions of color were the subject of many discussions in this area of the show. Some

arrangements included expensive flowers, while others featured more common species, which demonstrated that people can adjust any look to their budget.

## Floriculture: For Anyone on Any Scale

While the designers conveyed how flowers can enrich your life, they also showed consumers that gardening and floral design is for anyone. Guests wound through lines to peek into windows of miniature landscapes and arrangements. For example, a small delftware shoe held six tulips in an arrangement entered in the miniature division. For those not interested in the perishable nature of flowers, there were other competitions that might interest them. There were necklaces and earrings designed from natural plant materials and hats draped with dried flowers. For those who preferred to work in 2D design, a pressed flower division featured intricate, gorgeous landscapes.



Two other professional categories demonstrated how people could decorate their balconies or front entrances with flowers, complete with a set of wooden shoes in honor of the Dutch theme of the show. These displays showed consumers that a few well-chosen combination plants, deck boxes and patio furniture could make any small space inviting.

The show was very effective at connecting consumers with horticulture in that there were more than 4,500 individual amateur entries into various plant divisions. From fairy gardens to begonias to cacti, people entered their prized pet plants into divisions. These participants enjoyed seeing their plants featured on the exhibit floor. Not only did the show inspire and encourage the use of ornamental plants at home, they also invited consumers to take “spring” home with them. Kremp Florist offered flower show attendees two-dozen roses for only \$9.95. Many, if not the majority, left the flower show with a bouquet in their arms. Now that’s successful marketing!



## Transporting Guests to Holland

The fifth element that allured guests to ornamental horticulture at this year’s show was the feeling of being transported to the Netherlands without the \$1,200+ plane ticket. Displays and gardens at the show featured Dutch design elements such as stinze, which is a landscape design that features naturalized, no-mow lawns with spring bulbs intermingled. Bicycles, wooden shoes and delftware were incorporated into many of the gardens, arrangements and designs throughout the show. One daring design, “A Night Under the Red Light” decorated white mannequins with black feathers, white flowers and bracelets, which was a reference to the red-light district in the Netherlands.

This year’s Philadelphia Flower Show did an excellent job at demonstrating how consumers could incorporate ornamental horticulture into their lives. While many cities cannot support a show of this magnitude, it provides us all ideas of how to capture and motivate our consumers. Make it fun, give them a surprise, lure them in with great value and get CREATIVE! **GP**

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