

SPECIAL EXHIBITION

A GARDEN WITHIN DOORS: Plants and Flowers in the Home

Tuesday 30 March – Sunday 25 July 2010



'Sun and Moon Flowers' by CD Leslie, 1889 (Guildhall Art Gallery)

This exhibition will look at the enduring appeal of plants and flowers in the home and will investigate the meanings and values associated with indoor plants. It will explore what role houseplants and arranged flowers play in homemaking and in the psychology of the home, whilst taking into account changing fashions and tastes.

A Garden Within Doors will examine how plants and flowers were displayed over 400 years. It will explore why they were so valued, who chose and created the display, what flowers, plants and floral displays meant at the time and which of the decorative arts reflected all this. The strong links between home and garden will be highlighted by special displays in all of the museum's period rooms, which span in date from 1600 to 1998; in these spaces the houseplants and flower arrangements appropriate for the time will be displayed and set in their historical context. These historically accurate, often subtle, interventions in the period rooms will enable visitors to the Geffrye to track the evolving styles in the plant materials themselves and also in the vessels in which these natural beauties were displayed.

The main exhibition gallery will focus specifically on the long nineteenth century (1800-1914), a period when domestic gardening and an interest in bringing plants and flowers indoors grew dramatically. A thematic approach, structured into three main sections, will enable a clearer understanding of the complex network of ideas, concepts, physical goods and 'objects of desire' which created a vibrant and diverse 'floral culture' in nineteenth-century England. Two introductory sections will look at the creators and supporters of such a culture: the opinion formers – inventors, advisors, writers and publishers who spread ideas and information about the subject - and the suppliers - the plantsmen, nurseries, florists, manufacturers, designers and tradesmen to whom the middle classes went for their seeds, plants, flowers and equipment.

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Much of the exhibition will be given over to what actually happened 'at home' in the nineteenth century. Using a wide range of evidence – including technical advice, fictional literature, paintings and photographs, plant lists and drawings, correspondence and reminiscences and unusual pieces of decorative art – we will explore how and why the huge interest in plants and flowers manifested itself in Victorian middle-class homes. Through this, we hope to demonstrate that the deep engagement with plants and flowers was neither solely the province of the Victorian woman of the home ("the angel of the house") nor was it considered a subject without weight: to the contrary, some of the brightest writers and thinkers of the period held opinions on the subject and its importance, to both domestic life and society at large. The rich and inventive range of flower and plant holders that became available in the second half of the nineteenth century and paintings depicting flowers and houseplants will be on display to inspire and delight visitors to the exhibition.

The museum's period gardens will boast two special features, created specially for the exhibition: an eighteenth century '*auricula theatre*' and a '*pelargonium pyramid*'. The first is a staged display unit based on those popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which prized blooms of the popular auricula plant were displayed, both in the home and in competitions. The *pelargonium pyramid* is based on a suggestion made by horticultural writer and advisor Shirley Hibberd, who published a drawing of such a feature in his book *The Amateur's Flower Garden* (1878).

A Garden Within Doors will be a visually rich exhibition supported by a wide range of surprising textual evidence which promises to challenge perceptions about the long history of plants and flowers in the home.

"It would be rather a difficult matter to sum up all the social qualities of flowers. Do we not always feel welcome when, on entering a room, we find a display of flowers on the table? Where there are flowers about, does not the hostess appear glad, the children pleased, the very parrot garrulous, at our arrival; the whole scene and all the personages more hearty, homely, and beautiful, because of those bewitching roses, and brugmansias, and pavonias, and mignonette? Assuredly, of all simple domestic ornaments flowers must have first place".
Shirley Hibberd, 1856

"It is a treat at almost anytime of the year to pass along some of the streets and squares of London where window gardening is carried on to some extent. There it is evident window gardening has become an institution, for it is quite a common thing to see the facades, windows, balconies and areas of the houses gay with the richest verdure and glowing with all the colours of the rainbow...". John R Mollison, 1877

RELATED EVENTS/...

RELATED EVENTS

Exhibition Talk: A Garden Within Doors

An opportunity to explore and discuss themes and a selection of the objects on display, with Christine Lalumia, exhibition curator.

Saturday 24 April, 2.00pm and repeated at 3.30pm

Open Evening: A Garden Within Doors

An evening with a garden theme. Talks and workshops exploring all things floral in both indoor and outdoor gardens.

Thursday 20 May, 6.00-8.00pm. Talk at 6.45pm.

Study Day: A Garden Within Doors

A day of lectures and case studies, presented by curators, historians and specialists exploring themes and particular objects in the exhibition.

Saturday 12 June, 10.00am-4.30pm. Tickets £35 in advance (includes morning coffee and light lunch)

Adult Workshop: Funky and Festive Flowers

Use wellies and other weird and wonderful containers to create unique flower arrangements and indoor plant potholders for your home.

Saturday 8 May, 11.30am – 4.30pm. Tickets £25 in advance (includes materials but not lunch).

NOTES TO EDITORS

- 1) For further information or images, please contact Nancy Loader, Press Officer, on 020 7739 9893 or nloader@geffrye-museum.org.uk.
- 2) The exhibition has been curated by Christine Lalumia, deputy director of the Geffrye Museum, with contributions from Dr Catherine Horwood. The project manager is Alex Goddard.
- 3) The auricula theatre in the period gardens has been designed by the Dowager Marchioness of Salisbury. Lady Salisbury has a long-standing interest in auriculas and their display.
- 4) The Geffrye explores the home from 1600 to the present day. The museum's focus is on the living rooms of the urban middle classes in England, particularly London. A chronological sequence of period rooms shows how homes have been used and furnished over the past 400 years, reflecting the changes in society and patterns of behaviour as well as style, fashion and taste.

The museum is set in the former almshouses of the Ironmongers' Company, Grade 1 listed, early 18th century buildings. It is surrounded by attractive gardens, which include an award-winning herb garden and a series of period gardens showing the changing style of town gardens (open 1 April – 31 October).

- 5) Admission: FREE
Address: 136 Kingsland Road, Shoreditch, London E2
Tel No: 020 7739 9893 Email: info@geffrye-museum.org.uk
Web: www.geffrye-museum.org.uk
Open: Tuesday-Saturday 10am-5pm, Sunday & Bank Holiday Mons 12-5pm
Travel: Tube: Liverpool St, then bus 149 or 242/Old St (exit 2), then bus 243
Buses: 67, 149, 242, 243, 394
From June 2010: Hoxton station on the London Overground line.